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MY FISHING DAYS AND FISHING WAYS

By J. W. MARTIN
("THE TROUT OTTER")

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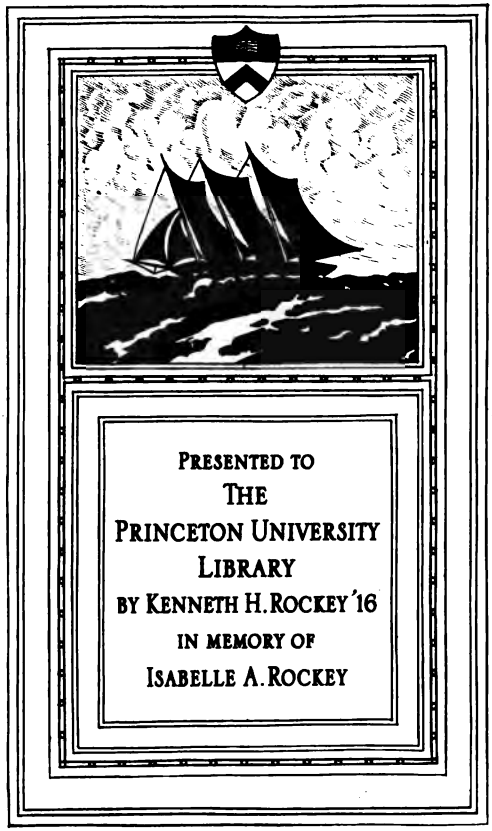

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HARLINGTON LAKE, BEDFORDSHIRE

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MY FISHING DAYS AND FISHING WAYS

BEING A RECORD OF EXPERIENCES GATHERED DURING FORTY-SIX YEARS OF AN ANGLER'S LIFE WHILE FISHING FOR SO-CALLED COARSE FISHES IN THE WATERS AND STREAMS OF SIXTEEN COUNTIES AND TWENTY-FIVE RIVERS

BY

J. W. MARTIN

("THE TRENT OTTER")

AUTHOR OF "FLOAT FISHING IN THE NOTTINGHAM STYLE"
"BARBEL AND CHUB FISHING," "PIKE AND PERCH FISHING"
"ROACH AND BREAM FISHING IN MANY WATERS"
"PRACTICAL FISHING FOR THE SO-CALLED COARSE FISHES"
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PREFATORY NOTE

MY Dear Brother Fisherman,—I make no apology for putting this volume on your already loaded bookshelves, because I have faith to believe that you will welcome this addition to the never-ending stream of angling literature.

The two volumes that I issued last year have met with phenomenal success, beyond my wildest hopes; and I thank my friends with a very grateful heart. To quote a well-known advertisement, they now "want more."

They are good enough to say that a volume of my own personal experiences and wanderings—on river, lake, and stream, here, there, and everywhere—would be warmly received by them, and treated in a sympathetic manner.

This volume does not pretend to be a guide to fishing, in the ordinary cut-and-dried sense of such term; but in its pages I take you into my confidence, and talk to you as one old fisherman talks to his mates, telling you what I saw on the various waters, the fish I found, how I succeeded and how I failed.

This book is a plain statement of fact and personal experiences, the pages of which furnish glimpses of natural history, descriptions of the waters and their characteristics, scenery and surroundings, together with a few historical notes connected therewith, which will perhaps have more than a passing interest for the wandering angler.

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During forty-six years, in my spare time, and sometimes when it could ill be spared, I have roamed in sixteen counties, have cast my lines in the waters of twenty-five rivers, and have seen much to instruct and very much to interest.

It is for the coarse-fish angler that I have principally written these seventeen chapters.

Again I say that I lay no claim to any literary ability, but just talk to you as one old shopmate will talk to his fellows, and trust you will get one-tenth of the pleasure in reading my rough notes that I got in the long years during which I did the fishing recorded here.

To the thousands of members of the London Anglers Benevolent Society, and their courteous Secretary, W. H. Barber, Esq., in slight recognition of the great work they have done for many years in assisting suffering brothers of the Rod, the Author, a member of its management committee, respectfully dedicates this book.

The illustrations in this volume are from photos taken specially for it by my friends Mr. W. T. Lawrence and Mr. W. H. Barber, whose kindness in this matter I shall never forget, and hereby acknowledge.

J. W. MARTIN,
"THE TRENT OTTER."

September, 1906.

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MY FISHING DAYS AND FISHING WAYS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Early days—The old fen gunner—Herons and frogs—Furred and feathered companions—The young ducks and the angler—The swimmer and the baited swim—The hungry anglers and the yard-long pudding.

MY memory wanders back across the vista of space that can only be counted by the half-century. Those far-off days, that loom like a shadow across my mental vision, bring glimpses of boyhood's hopes, of youth's ambitions, and manhood's slight success and heavy failures. Across that river of time, bridged by fifty years, much has happened; but who can say what it was that moulded my life and set my foot upon the pathway that I have travelled from that day to this?

I feel a certain reluctance in putting pen to paper and writing my experiences, because my schooldays ended and hard work began for me at the tender age of ten. I might have improved myself, limited as were the means at my disposal in those days; but, alas! I loved the squire's keeper and the keeper's ferret more than I did my books; but if I had loved the books I might have had a different tale to tell to-day. So everything has its compensations, and if I could be the arbiter of my own destiny I should again most certainly go the selfsame way. My early

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surroundings and upbringing in the very heart of the fens of Lincolnshire were conducive to a love of sport, even if it were only hunting the rats in a neighbouring rickyard, or chevying the blackbirds and linnets from hedgerow to hedgerow.

The old schoolmaster, Thomas Jackson, was not the kind of tutor to instil a love of sport into the hearts of his youthful pupils, holding with the poet the time-worn sentiment, that might be good poetry, but was certainly bad science, that "the beetle which we tread upon, in corporeal suffering feels a pang as great as when a giant dies." He never lost a chance of pulling down sport in any form; but fortunately for me I had a grandfather who was the keenest sportsman that ever lived—but he was also the most humane—who would go out of his way and interfere if he saw a boy pulling a donkey's ears or throwing a stone at a stray cat. But, alas! he died when I reached the mature age of ten, and a widowed mother and two boys had to fight the battle of life alone.

Such varied occupations as canal-boat boy, farmyard help, bricklayer's labourer, and blacksmith's assistant, claimed my attention for the next seven or eight years, bringing in just enough earnings to keep the wolf from the door and a change of raiment for the Sunday; and even then my reward very often consisted of "more cuffs than ha'pence," from men who, to use a vulgar phrase, had "neither sense nor feeling." Those occupations were varied at spare times by helping the squire's keeper, tramping the woods, spinneys, and meadows, to see that all was right. Now and again, armed with a set of wooden clappers, I used to march round and round the newly sown cornfields, making as much noise as ever I could, to try and keep the marauding rooks at a safe distance. All this business tuned my eyes and ears, and was a preliminary to that love of nature that took such a hold of me in later years. The one bright spot among all those early toils and troubles was the friendship that sprang up between an old wooden-legged pensioner and myself. This man gave

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me my first lessons in fishing, and I shall never forget the first roach I got in the Fortyfoot Canal close to Donington Fen. At odd times for years we roamed up and down those canals and drains, and many an object-lesson in nature on land and water did he give me.

Since then business and pleasure have between them taken my wandering footsteps far and wide. For years I roamed the banks of the Trent, and saw much of its fish and the wild life of its banks. For other years I wandered over the district of the fens and the Great Ouse, still further adding to my stock of knowledge, now and again paying brief visits to other waters far and near. Under these conditions it was only natural that I should get in close contact with experts in various branches of sport, and many were the wrinkles I picked up, many the fish I landed, and many the strange yarns I heard.

I remember one tale that was told one winter's night in the cottage of the wooden-legged roach fisherman that I have never forgotten. There used to be an old marsh gunner and fisherman who frequently brought his flatfish to our village for sale; he was rather a curiosity in his way. With an old wild-fowl gun he prowled the watercourses of the marshes, and between his fish and his fowl managed to eke out some sort of a livelihood. He was telling us one night a tale of an old blacksmith who had lately died at a very great age; he lived right on the edge of a dismal swamp, and worked at an outlying forge. This old smith was also a wild-fowler of no little skill and renown with both gun and nets. One afternoon early in January, a good many years ago, a couple of strangers who had heard of the smith's prowess knocked at the door of his humble dwelling, and in answer to the invitation went in. After some little talk that worthy agreed to take out the old weapon, and just show them the way an old goose or two ought to be knocked over.

It appeared that the old fowling-piece had a history somewhat terrible and awe-inspiring. It had a barrel about five feet in length, with a very curious short, heavy

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stock, and was fired with an old-fashioned flint and steel lock, the hammer of which when pulled back nearly reached the shooter's nose. The old blacksmith loaded this gun with a big handful of powder, and rammed down on the top of it another handful of notions, as he called them—the said notions being the heads of shoeing nails, little scraps of iron, mixed up with a few shot of various shapes and sizes. After carefully priming the pan the trio sallied forth, and, secreting themselves behind a blind erected under a bank of tall osiers, waited for something to turn up. In about an hour, just before it got too dark to see, that something, in the shape of half a dozen wild geese, did turn up within easy range. Taking deliberate aim, the blacksmith pulled the trigger: the gun went off like a small earthquake, and the next instant our old friend was flat on his back, the old gun ten feet away sticking muzzle downwards in the mud.

For nearly half an hour all the efforts of the two strangers to bring him round proved unavailing; they looked at each other in dire alarm, and finally decided to carry him to the hut where he lived. Before they could put this into execution, however, he opened his eyes and stared round in a bewildered manner; seeing the old gun and a couple of geese lying beside him, he quietly inquired of the two friends how long he had been there. "Oh, about twenty minutes or so," was the reply. Slowly rising to his feet and picking up his old weapon, he slapped it lovingly on the stock, and in a voice that had a touch of tenderness in it said, "Bless yer heart, my old beauty, you have been extra kind to me this time; it mostly takes me more than an hour to come round. But," he added, in a tone of satisfaction, "I always gets the gewse!"

It must be forty-five years since I heard the old fen-man, Hollis, tell that tale for the first time. I heard it several times after that, and the old man hardly ever varied his narrative. I can remember one or two of those old fen gunners and wildfowl netters, who had old muzzle-loading guns of fearful calibre, weighing as much as twenty pounds,

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and often fired with disastrous results. I think it was after a mishap with one of hese old weapons that the old man first spun the yarn.

It was during those early fishing days of mine that I saw one summer's evening something that I never saw again, from that day to this. Going home by the side of a wide drain at sunset I heard a pitiful cry, like a succession of faint squeals, and found it was a snake on the opposite bank that had nearly swallowed a large frog. I could just see its head and fore legs sticking out of the snake's jaws. I threw a stone at him, but my aim was bad, and he wriggled at once behind a patch of fen hemlocks, and I saw him no more. My old friend would persist that it was an eel gone up the bank to feed, but I knew it was a snake all right; he used to tell me that eels would leave the water at night to feed on the grass, and always maintained that the snake I saw was nothing more or less than a prowling eel. Since then I have had scores and scores of nights on various rivers and streams, and never once saw an eel come out of the water of his own free will, so I never took the statement seriously; but there are hundreds of anglers who firmly believe to-day that eels have this peculiarity.

There was an old swampy brick-pond down the fens that was a famous place for frogs, and sometimes I would see all round the edge scores and scores of black and flattened frogs, and wondered at the strange thing and what it meant. Some of the old superstitious dwellers of the fens would tell us that it was the fairies who came and squeezed all the juice from those frogs, and that if any little frogs were found after these visits hopping amongst the blackened remains, and were taken home and given to the tiny infants suffering from the worst kind of thrush, and sucked to death by them, that child would surely recover and live.

We found one of those frog fairies one morning early. We had set a rabbit trap in a run close to the water overnight, probably thinking we might catch a moor-hen, forgetting to fasten the trap securely to the ground. What was our

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astonishment to see a large heron rise with difficulty from the ground, and slowly fly away, with our trap hanging to one of its legs. It did look so comical that we laughed till we shook again; it could not tuck its long legs behind, as is usual with these birds in flight, and its flying was ludicrous in the extreme. I found afterwards that those herons were the fairies that squeezed the frogs, the half-digested, blackened remains being cast up by those birds.

There was one secluded place not far from Doddington Bridge, on the river Witham, that I frequently fished many years ago, and there were three old friends there that I always looked out for, and was very disappointed if I did not see one or other of them. One of them was a kingfisher who used to sit on the end of a rail that projected over the river, very nearly opposite the bushes where I made my seat. He would sit on that rail for ten minutes together; I could even see the twinkle of his eye. All at once he would drop from the rail with startling suddenness and disappear under the water, to reappear very shortly with a tiny fish in his beak, when, uttering his shrill cry, he would vanish up the river. That rail end must have been a favourite haunt of his, because I never went there during two seasons but what I saw him several times during the day; once he came and perched on the rod.

Another friend was a four-legged one, a clubtail (a species of weasel), that had its home in a heap of old thorns and rubbish about a dozen yards from my favourite swim. He used to lie up in that old rubbish-heap all day long, prowling about at night I make no doubt. I could entice him out of his lair once or twice during the day by making that peculiar squeaking noise with the mouth that all ferret-keepers are so familiar with. He would cautiously creep forth, advance a yard or two, stand up on his hind legs, and his head moved rapidly from side to side; then he would listen, still and motionless, for a minute, and retreat to his fortress. I saw that clubtail for two seasons, and looked on it as part and parcel of the day's enjoyment, never hinting to the keeper that such a thing existed on

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his rounds. I remember how lonely I felt one day when I discovered the heap of thorns gone and the big old briar bush cut down; half the charm of that magnificent roach swim had vanished.

The other friend of the three was a long-legged heron; and how I used to wait for him just before I packed up! He would stalk down a hedge side and look over the top of the kingfisher's rail; that used to be the nearest view I ever got of a wild heron. I used to hide myself in the willows on the opposite side and hardly draw my breath until he took wing and sailed away up stream. Ah, yes, there is more in fishing than catching fish; even the moorhens that used to dodge in and out the hedge bottom were counted as friends, and never disturbed. That roach swim was a quiet spot—not a living being to be seen from morning to night except the wild life of the place, and not a sound save the quiet lapping of the water and the bark of a distant dog.

I remember another place where a pair of wild ducks used to nest every year; this nest was on the top of an old stump, close to the surface of the water. I counted those eggs, eleven of them, several times. One day an old friend carrying a basket came to my place, and without any preliminary remarked, "Jack, I am going to fetch those young ducks of yours; come on and see the fun. I was there this morning, and I fancied they would hatch out in two or three hours." I went with him, to see the fun as he called it; but it turned out different fun from what he expected. On arriving at the place, though we peeped very cautiously through the boughs, not a sign of the old birds did we see; but the nest was full of tiny fluffy ducks, not an hour old I should say. My old friend cautiously wormed himself along that stump, and just as he was putting his hand over the nest—another three inches would have done it—the little ducklings slipped over the side, one after another, and dived down out of sight. Not a single one did he get; they vanished in the water, without even leaving a bubble behind. Now I have often wondered if this was a common

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occurrence. I have seen scores and scores of wild ducks' nests, but only that once did I see newly hatched birds show such celerity in getting away. I dare say the old ducks would call them together, and nobody be any the worse for it.

One of the strangest adventures I ever had when fishing was in the early morning of a glorious but hot August bank holiday. A friend named Spinks and myself had made arrangements to go to a famous spot on the middle Trent. A night or two previously we had clipped up nearly a thousand big lobworms and scattered them down the swim, the condition of the water being favourable for worm fishing. Everything pointed to a very successful day; the only thing was, could we get there early enough to have an uninterrupted use of the swim? Unfortunately I found my friend had overslept himself, and we were an hour and a half later in starting than the time arranged for. Spinks had another friend, a very small chap, who rejoiced in the name of Little Tich; he was Spinks' assistant in the ironworks. This little man was gone on fishing, but he had no judgment worth the name. He begged so hard to be one of the party that we had not the heart to refuse. Now as it happened the little man was early, and so he trudged along to the river. Arriving there, he waited patiently for an hour, and it being a very hot morning and he a born swimmer, he plunged in; and when we arrived on the scene, there he was splashing up and down the very swim we had baited.

The flow of language that Spinks treated his mate to was more forcible than polite; finally he made him swim over to the other side of the river, threatening to bombard him with stones if he dared to come our side for an hour. Here was a nice "how do you do." We expected that swim was utterly ruined, but it turned out better than we thought; but it was three hours before we got a fish, and we tried another place in the meantime with no result. Towards evening we got a fair bag, consisting of roach, dace, chub, and bream; but one lesson was learned—our small friend never bathed in a baited swim again.

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We will change the scene, and look at three very tired and very hungry anglers on another hot August day down the valley of the Great Ouse. The bottle was empty, the provisions had run out, and where to go we knew not; however, a tramp along a dusty lane revealed a tiny wayside inn. The good landlady had, she said, nothing but drink to offer hungry visitors; but presently she brought out from the kitchen a roly-poly pudding which if straightened out would have gone more than a yard in length, and set it on the table. "Thank God," said one of our number; but this grace was premature, for the landlady, seeing us about to make an onslaught on that long pudding, let out a squeal as long as a clothes-line and snatched it away, saying, "My gracious! but what will my poor children do?" And presently in they came, no less than eight of them, and the biggest not a dozen years old. I could see the destination of that pudding; why a two-yard pudding would have gone, and that quickly. "God bless their little hearts!" said the mother; and taking off my cap I re-echoed, "God bless their little hearts!" and we filtered away into the hot sunshine, still searching for the dinner that was so long in coming that day.

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CHAPTER II

THE ROACH FISHERMAN OF THE FENS

(EARLY EXPERIENCES)

The wooden-legged angler—Fishing in the fens of Lincolnshire—A day's roach fishing—Personal experiences—Fishing in the South Fortyfoot.

"SHIP ahoy! ahoy! ahoy!" rang out in hoarse but stentorian tones, waking the echoes in every direction and putting up a covey of partridges, which rose with one of those rattling whirrs that are so wont to startle unwary pedestrians. I gave an answering shout, and a little later a strange figure hove in sight, which, a minute after, stood by my side.

He was a man past the prime of life, but tall and erect as a pine, with a restless look about his keen grey eyes, which ever and anon kept sweeping the landscape in every direction, as though he were expecting a visitor from every point of the compass. He must have been a splendid specimen of manhood in his younger days—over six feet high at sixty-five years of age, and as tough as his native pollards. Seaman and boatswain for many years in the navy, but now retired and enjoying a well-earned pension; his wooden leg peeped from under the bottom of his trousers, and as this limb reached higher than his knee and was not jointed, it gave a peculiar rolling gait to his walk. I looked upon that ancient mariner and fisherman with a veneration something akin to awe, for was he not the champion roach and tench angler of the fens in his day? and could he not spin the strangest and most awe-inspiring yarns of his adventures in many a strange land, by flood, frost, and field?

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Nothing pleased him better than to have one or two of us in his cottage on a winter's evening, and bring out in vivid colours the story of his younger days, when hardships and press-gangs were everyday experiences; for he was a lonely man, with neither wife nor child. He was a devoted fisherman and a very successful one, and on this particular occasion we had been out for a couple of days, and had parted two hours previously, agreeing to meet at the spot where I was startled by his vigorous hail. The little cottage in which he lived had been bought by him some few years previously; it was only one storey high, with a couple of rooms and a back kitchen. Standing a little back from the main road, in a small, well-kept garden, with a mass of woodbine trailing and climbing up the sides, over the top of the rustic porch, and far up the thatched roof, it looked a lovely little place, with such an air of peaceful quiet about it that an artist in search of a subject to illustrate "Peace" would have grounded his easel and sketched it on the spot.

Inside, how strangely like the cabin of a ship it looked! A full-rigged model of a man-of-war of his day stood on a tall locker; two or three prints of Nelson's naval engagements and a curious old chart or map hung on the walls. The copper stove that stood under the mantelpiece was burnished to exceeding brightness, while here and there, on cunningly arranged shelves, was a large collection of marine shells of wonderful shape, size, and colour. In the other room a hammock swung in its net, and was fastened to the beam in the centre of the room by two huge iron hooks. Chairs there were none, but marvellously comfortable substitutes had been made on the lids of various lockers.

A well-known figure was the old man round that countryside, and occasionally anglers came from Spalding and elsewhere to enjoy a day's fishing with him during the season. But fish were plentiful and anglers scarce in those days, the majority of people holding anglers in great disdain, looking on them as a species of mild lunatic. My memory goes back to the time when I could not see two anglers at once on all those miles of splendid fishing that stretched far and

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wide in every direction, and swarmed with fish of various kinds. In nearly the very heart of the fens of Lincolnshire, a few miles from the market town of Spalding, the old man's cottage stood, close to one of those canals that intersected that county nearly everywhere, and in those days literally swarmed with roach, tench, bream, perch, and pike. Good fishing could be had then anywhere, from Podehole engine across to Deeping; back again to Donington Bridge on the Fortyfoot, or from Podehole to Spalding, then across to Pinchbeck West; all down Vennatt's Drain, and right across to the river Welland—to say nothing of the districts nearer Holbeach; Peterborough, Peakirk, and away to Boston and Wisbeach; scores and scores of miles of excellent fishing. Since leaving that fenland district I have kept in touch with its anglers, getting odd notes and newspaper cuttings from a Spalding friend. One of these cuttings recorded the capture of six tench from Vennatt's Drain that went nearly twenty pounds; and another of twenty-four pounds of good-class roach, and forty-five pounds of bream; while later on in the season I found recorded a bag of eighteen perch that weighed twenty pounds, and half a dozen good jack at a single outing, that averaged five pounds per fish. In fact, on carefully going over these notes, I find that the whole district has not lost its charm, but to-day its old character is maintained, and frequent good takes are obtained in every direction.

Angling clubs and preservation societies were things I never heard about in my early fishing days; and one or two poachers occasionally roamed the district, but I think their depredations did not amount to much. Since those days the societies have taken over long stretches of water in every direction, nearly every town and large village on the banks having some local association, whose object is to preserve the fishing; permission to fish can be obtained on payment of a small daily or weekly sum in very many cases. One thing is in its favour—the district seems to be out of the beaten track; but still, holiday anglers might do worse than explore the locality. Suppose they made Spalding

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their objective; there is a good society there, with miles of water, and daily tickets at a small charge; and the railway runs in various directions from there, giving our wandering angler a wide field to choose from.

But I must return to my wooden-legged old friend. This angler very seldom fished for anything except roach and tench, using a white paste of his own composition principally, varied occasionally with a few red worms or a handful of stewed wheat. The old man prided himself on that paste—he kept the secret of it to himself. I remember he used to chew up in his mouth a bit of white bread (it was generally brown or barley bread we got in those early days; but the old man made his paste from white bread, working it up in a clean rag). He never used water, always wetting the bread by chewing in the mouth; then he would put a few drops of something in it from two very small bottles that he always carried with him, finally dabbing the paste into a pinch or two of flour, until he could work it into the required consistency. I have seen him go out and catch sixty roach in two hours with that paste; but then, on the other hand, I have also seen him catch a similar lot of roach in the same length of time on stewed wheat a little earlier in the season.

A rod with brass ferrules, and jointed, was a luxury not dreamed about at that time; we had to make our own. These were generally all in one piece, and about twelve feet long, the bottom part, nearest the hand grip, being a pine broom-handle planed and tapered; then a straight bit of hazel, some five or six feet, tapering from three-quarters of an inch in diameter to about three-eighths; and finally there were two feet of an old whalebone umbrella-rib as a springy tip. These joints were all spliced, glued, and whipped with fine cord; and I can remember, as if it was only yesterday, how proud the old man was of that rod. Reels and running lines were unknown—a yard or two of fine cord looped over a button at the tip end sufficed for him; his tackle, like the rod, was home-made. Good horsehair could very easily be procured in those days, and his nine or ten feet of horsehair

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line was such as I never saw anywhere else in all my wanderings. The first three or four feet were composed of six hairs plaited carefully and smoothly together, the next of three hairs; then came a long length of two hairs twisted, and finally about two feet of the strongest and longest single white hair he could find, the joinings being spliced and whipped most carefully; and the hook at end was an old-fashioned Kirby sneck bend. I remember that day he had just finished one of these lines, and lifted a two-pound weight with it; it was easily up to killing a three- or four-pound tench. Farm-horses in those days were different from what we see now; now they are all flesh and no hair to speak of; then they were raw-boned, with tails nearly reaching the ground.

A night or two before the incident recorded in the opening sentence of this chapter I had gone down to the old man's cottage, and found him busily engaged getting ready for our fishing trip, that was going to last a couple of days this time. Between Podehole and Gunn's Bridge, on the South Fortyfoot, was the place selected, where the roach were fairly plentiful and ran up to a good size; it was a very favourite spot of his, some little distance from the cottage in which he lived. Hook baits were all ready, and creature comforts in the old basket not forgotten. The old man's ground-bait varied very little from the one I use to-day; the lessons taught me then will never be eradicated—bread, bran, and a handful of meal, the whole flavoured with a penny packet of Thorley's pig food, which was all the rage in the Lincolnshire fens at that time; the whole being mixed together in stiffish balls.

Next morning we were up early, the sun just rising as we started for our one hour's tramp. Arriving, we commenced operations by quietly dropping half-a-dozen small balls of ground-bait, a little bigger than walnuts, in a beautiful place just over a long fringe of weeds. The water hardly anywhere is more than four or five feet deep, with no stream worth the name, a small goosequill carrying about three shots being ample to fish it. Sitting down on his

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basket, with the wooden leg sticking out in front like the barrel of a duck gun, he put on a kernel of wheat, and within five minutes a half-pound roach was kicking and gasping on the grass. This was followed by another, and still another, so that within the half-hour eight or ten good fish were duly bagged. This was decidedly good business, setting my fingers on the itch ; so the old man had no peace until he had cut me a suitable willow and fitted it up with a float and spare line. But, alas ! my early efforts were not crowned with the success my enthusiasm deserved, for my share of the day's spoil did not assist the weight of the total bag by more than four or five pounds ; but they were my first, or nearly so, and are to me a sacred memory that will never fade. But the tutor was good and long-suffering and the pupil was willing, so improvement was rapid, and the day came, before very many seasons were over, when he had to put in all he knew to much overtop my catches. The fun went on that day more or less rapidly until the lengthening shadows warned us that it was time to suspend operations for that day and make preparations for the next. Counting up the spoil, we found nearly a hundred roach that would go a little more than three to the pound, and a brace of very fair tench. We were wondering what we should do with our fish ; but on arriving at the little road-side inn where we were going to stay the night we found a fishmonger and his cart from Spalding there. The man seemed glad to have them, giving us two or three shillings for the whole lot.

Next morning we were again up early, and tramped along the bank to another favourite place, about two miles nearer home. This swim was just at the mouth of a small drain that ran from the higher lands, and had a most decided current down it. It was rather deeper just there than the usual thing in that canal, and was the old man's particular favourite. We did not get quite so many fish that day as we did on the previous day, but the majority of the roach were larger, and the basket was topped with five good tench, one of which I am certain went over three pounds,

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so what we lacked in numbers was made up in gross weight. Stewed wheat and white paste seemed to be about equally divided as bait there, the roach and tench taking both at times freely, particularly during the summer and early autumn.

This locality, as I said a page or two back, seems to me to be out of the beaten track, right away from the fashionable angling world and resorts; the angler who fished it would have to rough it I dare say, but in all likelihood the fishing would compensate.

The South Fortyfoot that links up the country farmers between Podehole and Boston has many advantages to offer the wandering angler. I remember once a pike being captured on a dead gorge tackle not far from Donington Bridge, that reached over twenty pounds; and an annual visitor who stayed in a farmhouse opposite the lane end that leads to Donington Northorp captured many eels on night-lines that reached as heavy a weight as eight and nine pounds. I should say the roach fishing is still its chief charm, that visitor just named telling me that sometimes sport is so good that it gets monotonous. There was a little waterside public-house close to Donington Bridge, which may still exist and be very useful to intending visitors. This house, I fancy, is about half-way between Podehole and Boston, and on either hand for miles stretches a water that ought to please anybody. It was not far from there that I landed my first roach; I can see the place in my mind's eye now, close to an old black water-mill, hard by Ridley's Farm.

The country, taking it on the whole, is rather flat and uninteresting. The canal is not very wide nor yet deep, four joints of a roach pole or an eleven-foot Nottingham rod being sufficient anywhere. I fancy since I left that way the water is preserved by some association other than the Spalding one, but I think the charge is only a shilling for the whole season. The old wooden-legged pensioner and I roamed for miles along those banks one time or other, and I owe him a debt of gratitude that I never repaid. He

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"THERE ARE SOME BIG BREAM"

THE ROOKERY SWIM, BURES, ON THE SUFFOLK STOUR

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instilled into my young life that love of fish, fishing, and nature that sticks to me even now when the locks on my brow have turned grey.

I could not help giving this chapter the pride of place in this book, as some little acknowledgment of what I owe to him and his humane teachings and example. Circumstances over which I had no control caused me to drift away from the place, and it was years after when I next set foot upon the familiar ground. Alas! the old cottage was remodelled, and had passed into a stranger's hands, who knew not the wizard of the rod who once owned it. The porch, with its trailing woodbine, was a thing of the past; the grass was growing green over the place where they had laid him; and I turned away with a lump in my throat and a whispered prayer that the earth might lightly lie on one of the best who ever walked its surface.

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CHAPTER III

BUSH FISHING FOR PERCH

(ON THE BANKS OF THE RIVER WITHAM)

The Mid-Witham, in Lincolnshire—Insect collecting—The perch fishing outfit—Paternoster tackle—How to fish for perch—Habits and haunts of perch—Perch in the frying-pan.

THE river Witham, which intersects the counties of Nottingham and Lincoln, in some places nearly forming the boundary line of the two, and flowing from Long Bennington down to Bassingham, a goodly stretch of water, was a very favourite hunting-ground of mine in more branches of sport than fishing pure and simple. This long stretch of a beautiful river is marvellously diversified in its general surroundings and characteristics. In some places the stream flows along at a pretty fair pace, with an average depth of not more than eighteen inches or two feet, with little holes and corners very often in evidence—such, for instance, as the long reach from Claypole down to Barnby, or the shallows from Beckingham to Norton Disney, where large shoals of dace disported themselves nearly everywhere. And then again in some places it is very sluggish, with a uniform depth of four feet, particularly that capital stretch between Dry Doddington and Claypole weir, or that one between Carlton-le-Moorland and Bassingham, where some excellent roach rewarded my efforts on many occasions. This part of the Witham was away from the beaten track, the tourist-angler being seldom seen on its banks; the nearest town of any importance was Newark-on-Trent, and I suppose the reason why that town's anglers did not largely patronize it, lay in the fact that the much more mighty Trent was close to their very doors.

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It meant a long walk to reach the out-of-the-way places where sport was certain. I remember one August bank holiday getting one of the finest catches of roach I ever got at one sitting, from a hole under the shadow of a willow tree, near Norton Disney. I had ninety fish, weighing sixty-one pounds—only two exceeded the pound, and not one was less than half a pound; another day I got thirty-nine, weighing twenty-two and a half pounds; and still another bag contained twenty-four roach weighing seventeen pounds, including one that tipped the beam at 1 lb. 14¾ ozs. I have also had chub, perch, and dace galore.

By the great goodness of Squire Nevill of Stubton, Rev. Mr. Brocklebank of Carlton-le-Moorland, and another sportsman or two of the good old-fashioned sort, I was permitted to wet my lines in those waters occasionally, and excellent fishing it used to be. Besides, the ever-varying charm of the place was delightful in the extreme; those old thick willow stumps that had a crown of waving green were in places so plentiful along the very brink of the water that an opening could hardly be found among them, and a lot of first-class water had to go unfished. In some parts the river ran along flat, swampy meadows, with high grass growing rich and luxuriant, dotted all over with patches of beautifully coloured wild flowers; while now and again the banks were loose stones and gravel that crumbled away at every step. The country was well wooded, some of the most noted woods in the two shires being in close proximity; while hill and valley, mansion and cottage, lent a charming variety to the landscape, that would repay a visit even if the fish were not in a taking humour.

This particular district of the river Witham, with its woods and meadows, was a paradise for the insect collector; some of the gems of my own collection of butterflies, moths, and beetles I had from there, Stapleford Wood, Langford Moor, Norton Disney Wood, and the whole district round, being laid under contribution for years and years. It was close to Brant Broughton rectory that I saw for the first time in my life one of those rare British butterflies,

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the Camberwell Beauty, alive and on the wing, and I have never forgotten the long and patient stalk I had after him, nor yet the thrill that went through me when my green gauze net made him a prisoner. One day, on a field of red clover I saw swarms of peacock butterflies, in my opinion one of the most magnificent flies in England. In the wood at Stapleford I one day lured down a splendid male Purple Emperor; high up above a glorious old oak he wheeled and circled; how intently I watched him as he rose and fell, now and again hid from sight by the top of the tree, ever and anon soaring up and up, until I was afraid he would never return; he looked like a living gem in that brilliant sunshine. But, alas! his tastes were shamefully depraved. Down, down he came to mother earth, lured by a dead cat in the last stages of decomposition; when he was taking his fill the ready net swept him off; and now he occupies an honoured place in my cabinet. The Fritillaries, too, were there, swift of wing and hard to catch; and once I was lucky enough to net a beautiful specimen of the rare "Queen of Spain." A disused gravel-pit also yielded me a pair of large Tortoiseshell butterflies, whose outstretched wings extended to more than two and a half inches; while Red Admirals, Brimstones, and Clouded Yellows lent a charming variety to the collector's box. In the gloom of the wood, too, large moths were frequently got, the Hawk moths predominating. There was also a deep dry ditch, whose banks on either side were lined by bramble and blackberry bushes; and such a wealth of wild fruit festooned those banks that I was struck with astonishment. Blackberries were of such a size that I never before or since saw their equal—they could have been gathered by the bushel; in fact, our jars of preserved blackberry were the tit-bits of the following winter.

In a yellow gorse bush I one day found a young brown linnet, and for more than a dozen years that songster was ever ready to welcome me with its sweet low song. We are not ashamed to own that when old age claimed that bird as a victim it was clearly a case of "one touch of nature

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makes the whole world kin." That wooded district of the river Witham gave me also such an insight into the wild life of its feathered and furred denizens that I am afraid fishing had to put up with a back seat; but my great motto has always been, "There is more in fishing than catching fish," and life has been better and brighter for the experience.

But to return to our fishing. The Witham itself just there was of no great width, a moderate cast with a float tackle being sufficient to cover it well nearly everywhere. As I hinted a while ago, old roots and bushes were pretty plentiful in very many places, and perch are a fish that delight in the cover thus afforded. Generally speaking, these places were the deepest parts of the river, and a careful peering through the boughs when the water was clear would result in one or two drifting forms being seen below, flitting past like shadows. There are two ways of bush-fishing for perch that are peculiarly adapted for waters of the kind now under notice; one is with a short float tackle, allowing the float to travel slowly down stream if the current has any pretence at all to run; and the other is paternostering with a light lead and without a float, casting the lead well down in front of the bushes, and gradually working it up stream inch by inch.

One of my friends used to swear by a light leger tackle, but he was far more successful among the chub by that method than he was among the perch. For this fishing the rod need not be too long nor yet very elaborate—an eleven-foot light Nottingham chub rod, built of East India cane, in three lengths, with a balance handle and a couple of greenheart tops, mounted with good safety upright rings. The whole rod should be fairly stiff and powerful, as you might have to hang on tight in a dangerous position, and you might have to pass it through openings in the bushes, or even submerge it in the water if occasion required.

A three-and-a-half-inch ordinary Nottingham wooden reel, free and easy running, with forty or fifty yards of ordinary plaited silk chub line, is plenty good enough for

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all practical purposes. The whole outfit need not be very expensive; but a good stout landing net, with a long hollow handle to carry the spare rod top, would be a necessity. If a float tackle is preferred, then that float should be a stumpy pelican quill or a tapered cork, it does not matter which so long as it is large enough to carry a very small drilled bullet, or, better still, a half-inch length of spiral lead wire; this can be more easily put on and removed from the tackle. Hooks for float fishing can be No. 6 square sneck bends for minnows, and Nos. 6 or 7 Crystals or round bends for worms, or grubs of a similar character; but care must be taken in this bush fishing that no more than one set of hooks are on the tackle, whether that tackle is float or paternoster. There are so many obstructions in the various swims that a lively perch fighting for its liberty would ten to one hang the extra hook or hooks firmly round an old root, and loss of fish and temper would be the only result. A yard of good sound medium gut is ample for the bottom, and this can have a loop tied on it at either end, one to knot the reel line in, and the other to loop in the gut hook as required. In making and using a paternoster for this bush fishing I found a very simple pattern to be the most effective. A loop about one and a half inches long should be tied about a foot from the end; this loop should stick out stiffly at right angles from the main gut line; the gut on the hook need not be any longer than three inches, and it can easily be looped into the tackle; a foot below the hook a medium-sized pear-shaped lead that has a wire eye can be fixed.

I found a single sneck bend hook, when using a minnow or a tiny gudgeon, hardly quick enough for this bush fishing, as you could not respond instantly at the pluck of a perch, and to give him much time among the boughs and roots was only courting disaster. To meet this difficulty I found the addition of a tiny treble, no larger in any case than a No. 12 or 13, to be a great improvement. This treble should be firmly whipped to the extreme end of the three or four inches of gut, and about one and a half inches or so

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above it the single hook can be bound on; unless it is an eyed lip hook, in which case it can be shifted to suit the size of the bait. In baiting this tackle the single hook is lightly but firmly and tenderly hooked through both lips of the minnow or gudgeon, care being taken that the point of the hook projects through the lip and stands upwards. The tiny treble is then stuck lightly in the bait by one of the barbs as far towards the root of the tail as possible. I found out very soon that a perch could be struck with this tackle as soon as ever you felt the pluck.

Of course, minnows can be used on the float tackle as well as worms, the hooks in this case being the same as for the paternoster, except that they are at the extreme end of the line instead of being some distance above. In using the float tackle with either minnows or worms it is advisable to carefully ascertain the depth of the swim, particular care being taken that the bait does not trail along the bottom; this more particularly refers to minnows—you need not be so careful when using worms. If you can anyhow help it, do not cover too much water when float fishing among the roots and boughs, as in a long swim you might not be able to keep command of a hooked perch, and a breakage among the roots is very often fatal to your chance of further success, in that place at any rate. I never consider, somehow or other, that it is worth while float fishing for perch in a still water, much preferring a nice moderate stream of sufficient strength to carry the float onward at an easy pace. The float should always be held back, so that the bait goes first; if the float is allowed to go where it likes the bait will trail behind, and a difficulty be experienced in hooking the fish promptly and effectively.

The most deadly piece of tackle for bush fishing with minnows, etc., is undoubtedly the paternoster, and in using this one or two golden rules should be observed. A tight line should always be employed—no loose line whatever between reel and lead. Cast down stream, and a little outwards from the bushes, as far as you think necessary, and gradually, inch by inch, slowly and carefully, wind the line

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back again until the bait is close to your feet, the lead always on the bottom, the line tight and no bagging; wind the line in very slowly, and keep raising the rod point at intervals. Ground baiting, as we understand it for barbel, bream, and roach, must not be indulged in, to that extent at any rate; sparingly must be the motto in this, a few lobworms clipped up very small and thrown in from time to time being ample; this ground bait will do, even when using minnows.

The outfit for this bush fishing should be as compact as possible; what few things you want should be carried in a haversack slung across the shoulders; and as a bait-can is liable to be a bit of a nuisance, a couple or three dozen minnows or tiny gudgeon can be carried in a bottle, and it can be corked down without danger to the inmates, care being taken that the bottle is not too full of water.

This is a delightful method of fishing for perch in small streams where roots and boughs exist, and was a branch of sport that appealed to me, and one that I looked forward to a time or two during the season. I used to fish two or three miles of water, sometimes getting as many as fifteen perch a day, ranging in weight from half a pound up to as much as one and three-quarter pounds, which should be good enough for any ordinary fisherman who does not want to be branded as a pot-hunter. I found the best months of the year were from September onwards; October can be set down as a very fair month; while February and very early in March, if you could find the haunts of the fish, was best of all, as the perch were then beginning to pack, and were in splendid condition and fighting trim, considerable quantities sometimes being massed together in a very short stretch of water, while very long reaches of the river on either hand would be practically tenantless. Their distribution and haunts were more general during the early part of the autumn, before the frosts set in.

Perch fishing under ordinary circumstances is a chuck-and-chance-it affair for the most part—you must search for your fish, and it is not worth while in bush fishing to stay

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very long in one place, unless you meet with unexpected luck; but in February, when the fish have packed, and you do happen to find one or two at home, it is wise to give a good stretch of that water a long and careful trial.

I have not much faith in perch fishing during a very long and severe frost, preferring most decidedly open weather and a mild sunshine. The early days after the break-up of a long and hard winter are very often fatal to quantities of fine perch, owing most likely to hunger and their tendency to pack together.

It is a usual thing when examining a bag of perch to find the female fish predominate, the average of my catches being quite five or six to one; once only can I find a note of a personal catch where the males exceeded the females in number, and then I had ten fish, half a dozen of which were males. One old friend of mine would have it that perch were bi-sexual, but I could not have this, as I never saw in all the hundreds of perch I have opened the roe and milt in one ovum. Perch are a game fish, quite the equal of brook trout when in the frying-pan. I remember the granddaughter of Charlie Hudson, the old Trent professional, who lived during the summer in a roomy house-boat hard by Dunham Bridge. She could cook a dish of perch with a success that a French chef might have envied. I can taste them even now.

That old professional used to say that there was not one cook in a hundred who knew how to properly cook a perch. Scraping the scales off, washing them in several lots of lukewarm water, and then hanging them up to dry, was calculated to spoil them any time. He liked them put inside the pan within an hour after being caught, and had them simply opened, the inside removed, then wiped down with a cloth, and fried with all their juices in them. They could be turned out of their skins easily enough when sufficiently cooked; and when served by that old professional's granddaughter, in the cabin of that house-boat, it was a dish of meat "too good for anybody, except anglers and very honest men," as our father Izaak Walton said in

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his day; a remark which I cordially endorse. Those perch were among the treats of my Dunham outings.

I remember one day joining a gentleman for a day's bush fishing, and found he had a capital little stream, with all sorts of old posts and camp-shedding, together with overhanging bushes and weed-beds, to say nothing of all the holes and eddies everywhere in evidence. Altogether it looked the very picture of a perch paradise, and one that I should specially cultivate for that fish if it were mine. We found the perch fairly plentiful, although we got nothing that exceeded one and a half pounds; and we tried both minnows and worms. Presently a boy, armed with a willow stick and a penny line, strolled down. This boy looked as if he had stepped direct from the rag-bag, as the rents in his knickers and jacket were painfully in evidence; while the remnant of his straw hat flopped over one ear in a very rakish manner.

After asking permission to fish, which my friend readily granted, he begged the loan of a few worms, and commenced among the old sunken posts, which we both had tried more than once during the morning, with no results to speak of. Presently we heard a loud yell, and, fearing the boy had fallen in, rushed to the rescue; but there he was, hanging on to his stick with both hands, and shouting for all he was worth. It was a perch he had got, weighing close on three pounds; a fish my friend had been trying to get for more than fifteen years, and failed. Prizes of this sort generally fall to the lot of a boy; and nine times out of ten they are taken on the rudest tackle and with the roughest bait.

Just one brief record of a memorable day on that little river. It was a lovely morning in early October; the woods and moors at Norton Disney and Langford were looking their very best; the autumnal tints were beginning to show on leaf, bough, sedge, and underbrush. The willow twigs beat the water with the same old rhythmic swing; and the river Witham, reinforced by a very heavy shower, was laughing along under those willows like a maiden

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whose cares had not commenced. That October morning found me there, with a bottle of live minnows, and my paternoster tackle. Many a bough and many a hole did I try; and at night when I set out for the seven miles homeward tramp, the old haversack was weighted with fifteen perch, weighing seventeen pounds, and three chub averaging two and a half pounds each. A goodly bag, and one that memory lingers over still.

It is the figurative culling of these metaphorical flowers growing upon the banks of fishing experience, which colours the angler's retrospection with a charm beyond the power of the mere achievement of statistical records to produce.

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CHAPTER IV

TROUTING IN A TINY BROOK

(THE NOTTINGHAMSHIRE GREET)

Looking back—The outfit for brook fishing—The little mill stream —The Nottinghamshire Greet—Fishing the streams.

IN looking back over a life whose spare time has been devoted to the rod, the gun, and the collector's net, there rise across the mental vision certain days and certain well-remembered scenes that refuse to be thrust into the background; days that are marked with a deep red cross in our calendar. Such a one I have now to record: it is only one out of many; but there is always something special in those particular days that make them stand head and shoulders above their fellows, and will persist in thrusting itself into the very forefront of our thoughts.

One Wednesday evening, in the opening days of a glorious summer, the postman handed me a very short but extremely sweet and pregnant note, that ran as follows: "Come up to-morrow; I am going to run the mill." To the stranger these few words would perhaps have very little, if any, significance whatever, but to me they conjured up a bright vision of hope, because I had had similar notes before, and I knew exactly what this one meant. Already in my mind's eye I could see the water pouring through the time-stained and battered old water-wheel, then gliding away down a mere runnel with many a winding curve and twist, until finally lost in the parent stream some couple of miles lower down. Already I could feel the strong rush of some of those noble brook trout, for which this district is so famous; already I could see some of them dangling from

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the bushes when they leaped to escape the troublesome steel—could feel the annoyance provoked by a hooked trout fast under a root just two feet beyond my reach with the net —could see in fancy a most carefully prepared bait, curled so lovingly round and round a stout twig, and nothing left but to break away——But I anticipate.

The morning dawned bright and beautiful; my note-book says there had been several hours' steady rain during the preceding two days. This had freshened up the water, and put Dame Nature on the very best of terms with herself; in fact, it was a day that might have been made on purpose for the benefit of the enthusiastic trout-fisherman. I put the necessary tackle together for the particular sport on hand, which in such a case need not be very much, nor yet very costly. The outfit should be as light and as compact as possible; everything, however, should be pretty strong, for the fish are lusty and the situation very cramped. A light ten-foot Nottingham leger rod, handy and accurate, with good large safety rings; a rod with plenty of spring in it, but still with a backbone that can be felt, is the very thing for the work now under notice, because it frequently happens that the fish or the hook gets fixed into or under old snags or roots, so the rod must not be too slim and slight, or it would snap when giving a sharp jerk to the tackle to loosen or break it away. A light three-inch wood reel that runs fairly free will be good enough; there is no necessity for a centre pin or anything so elaborate. Thirty or forty yards of fine but strong chub line of undressed silk, two or three short and stumpy quill floats, no more than four or five inches long at the outside, but still capable of carrying four or five medium to large split shots. A few lengths of undrawn refina gut, eighteen inches long, will be ample; and a dozen No. 7 round bend hooks mounted on similar gut and stained a sandy brown. A box of split shot; a bag with half a hundred nicely scoured maiden lobworms, together with a handy folding landing-net. This will be about all that will be required, for, be it known, the fishing is what is called "roving bush

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fishing." It was utterly impossible to get a fly on the water. The tiny stream was so narrow, the banks in many places so steep, and everywhere so overhung with such a profusion of bushes and trees, that the fly fisherman would get into a hopeless muddle if he only attempted it.

A ride by train of seven or eight miles landed me at the small city of Southwell, in Nottinghamshire, and was the nearest station to my friend the miller's water. Southwell is a very ancient place, mentioned in the Itinerary of Antoninus as the Roman city of Ad-Pontem. It is a reputed fact that Paulinus, the first missionary from Rome, who preached Christianity to the ancient Saxons of Notts, lived and laboured at Southwell during the seventh century. The time-honoured minster there is said to have been founded by him as long ago as A.D. 627, and, with only one exception, dates as the very oldest church in England.

A stranger not acquainted with its peculiarities, seeing the little stream that carried the water away from the mill tail, when the mill itself was not running, would think any one was in the last stages of imbecility to even think of fishing in it, so insignificant and unpromising did it look. At the very most it was barely six feet wide—in some places it would not exceed three or four; and when the mill was not running it looked nothing more nor less than a stagnant ditch. I often caught myself wondering how those trout managed to live and thrive in such a place during the long and frequent periods of the mill's inactivity—for it must be understood that the stream was so very small, and the volume of water coming down from the higher lands at a normal time of the year so little, that three or four hours' work was quite sufficient to exhaust the supply, and very frequently a week would elapse before sufficient water would accumulate in the dam above the mill to run it for another three or four hours.

I used to wonder where the practical utility of that mill came in, for most certainly no great quantity of flour could be turned out in such a very short time. Most likely the stout yeoman miller, in those far-away days, who first

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selected the spot and dug out the dam, fixed his eye on the extreme sylvan beauty of the place. Perhaps he thought those lovely glades looked promising in more senses than one, and the tiny stream a still further attraction, that might be utilized for the benefit of himself and his modest wants in those days. Who knows but what he was like the miller in bluff King Hal's time, who envied no man's lot, not even the King's, when that sorely pressed and harassed monarch would fain have exchanged his crown for the miller's cap, but could sing lustily, in the words of the old ballad—

"God bless the rill that turns the mill
And feeds my babes and me"?

Certainly I had no occasion to grumble at the ancient miller who first fixed on that particular spot to dig out his dam, to store up the water that would inevitably be wasted, to fashion his waterwheel, and to build up his walls; for the trout of that little stream were particularly active, handsome in shape and colour, besides being of a very fair size, and fighters to the last gasp. This tiny mill stream, after many a winding curve and twist, through scenery of exquisite beauty—now hidden in a dense undergrowth of bushes; now alongside a trim-kept orchard; again diving underneath a mighty hedge; anon skirting a plantation of firs, then again tumbling over in the very smallest of cascades, and brawling among the stones of its here and there unlevel and rocky bed; now widening out to a pool quite six feet in width, again contracting to less than two feet;—this little brook went on and on, finally emptying itself into that famous Nottinghamshire trout stream—the Greet.

This little river, at the time of which I am writing, was one of the splendid trout preserves of the Midlands, with a ten- or twelve-guinea annual subscription, and a membership limited, I think, to a dozen; and the baskets of trout were limited to a fixed number of brace. Permission to fish it was very, very difficult to obtain. The secretary lived at the silk-mill on the water; they had their own hatching house, and thousands of small trout were turned in every

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year. That little river was more diversified in its character than any other stream I ever saw. As the crow flies it was not a great length, but the turns and twists it took in its course were wonderful—it literally doubled back upon itself in lots of places. An old friend of mine used to say that in many spots there was more river than field. I have seen a fly fisherman casting about a couple of fields in front up stream, and in the course of the next hour or two he would appear to be a similar distance behind us down stream, so marvellously did the stream double and wind. Then, again, it was sluggish and deep in some of its reaches, and a shallow rattling current in others, weeds being pretty plentiful in most of them—altogether the beau-ideal of a trout river. I have seen swarms of May-flies dancing on the brink, rising and falling, looking in the distance like a small cloud of mist; but I have heard an expert angler on that water say it was very seldom the trout took an artificial May-fly, which was strange, seeing the swarms of naturals there were sometimes about.

That friend was once commissioned to catch some trout which were wanted for the tenants on the banks. In six hours he landed no less than twenty-nine brace, many of the fish running up to two and a half pounds. He used very small flies and very few in number, depending upon half a dozen patterns for the whole of the season, his favourites being March Brown, Wickham's Fancy, Dark Mackerel, August Dun, Red Spinner, and Black Gnat, varied at times with an Olive Dun and a Red Tag. The largest trout I ever heard about from the river weighed very nearly four pounds, my own top weight being 2 lb. 14 ozs., and I got him from a very difficult situation, and was very proud of the feat.

But to return to our little mill stream; the trout in it were a little smaller, going from half a pound to a pound, with an odd one of one and a half pound to top the basket occasionally. It was not a bit of good trying to fish the place when the mill was not running. Where they hid themselves, or how they managed to exist during the long

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"A TROUT WAS RISING"

THE SHOULDER OF MUTTON, THORNEY WEIR, ON THE HERTFORDSHIRE COLNE

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periods of the mill's inactivity, puzzled me not a little; for remember, water only ran down the tiny rivulet a few hours every week. But within ten minutes of the sluice being opened, and the old water-wheel revolving, then every trout in the place was mad on, eagerly looking out for any stray scraps swept down by the oncoming flood; so it was very certain they could not have come up from the main stream in so short a time. Once or twice during the season the friendly miller would drop me a note similar to the one quoted at the commencement of this chapter, and as the opportunity was too good to be wantonly lost, something very desperate had to be the matter if I failed to go.

At the particular time of which I write I found, on arriving at the scene of operations, the mill dam in front full to the brim, while the "clank, clank" of the ancient water-wheel proclaimed the fact that water was just beginning to trickle down the little stream below. Getting to work with as little delay as possible in the small pool at the foot of the wheel, with the tail end of a lobworm, I had a brace of pounders safely creeled inside twenty minutes. This was decidedly good business, raising hopes of a fine afternoon's sport, which the subsequent result amply justified. After leaving the tail of the mill there was rather a long stretch of unproductive water, which never seemed to hold any fish at all. An abrupt corner, where the water ran alongside a row of brambles, probably a couple of feet deep and about the same width, next claimed attention; here three half-pounders, lusty and strong, were added to the basket. A little lower down a willow projected right over the water, with its encircling arms spreading about in every direction, and here I had the first mishap of the afternoon. Right under this willow was a likely pool, very small, it was true; it took me fully ten minutes to persuade that worm to go properly into the right place, and once there it only required about two more seconds to finish the job and hasten the catastrophe. A fine trout, on being hooked, at once sprang upwards, dropped over the other side of a bough, hung there for a second, then gave another upward

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jerk, and like a shadow vanished into the pool from which he came. I had to repair damages after that, and go lower down stream in search of further adventures.

A tiny cascade over a rocky bottom, where the stream dropped a few inches over a series of small ledges, next claimed attention; this was one of the most certain places for sport and breakages in the whole length of the water. Just here, on the opposite side, the bank rose steep and abrupt some ten or eleven feet above the waterline; this bank was a series of stone shelves or layers piled one above another with remarkable regularity. They looked as though they had been built there by human hands in the days long past, the cracks and crevices between the stones being inhabited by all sorts of spiders, tiny beetles, and other insects. While examining this living colony a kingfisher plopped out of a hole within a foot of my head with startling suddenness, and, uttering his shrill cry of alarm, flitted down the brook like a living gem. I poked the thin end of my landing handle into that hole, but could not reach the end of it; if any one had wanted that nest it would have required a heavy charge of dynamite to have blown up the solid rocks, as my landing-net went into the crevice at least two feet.

A little below one of these tiny waterfalls a big stone stuck up out of the water, forming a pool not more than eighteen inches deep and less than a yard across it. This pool gave me the best trout of the afternoon, a grand fish of nearly 1¾ lb. Hereabouts were twenty yards of capital water, which yielded no fewer than five of my best fish; but the surroundings were so cramped, and the bushes so much in evidence, together with the gloom caused by some thick overhanging trees, that a considerable amount of crawling and snake-like progression had to be indulged in before I got those five fish safely landed. The afternoon was wearing on, and there were still a few good places to try; but all at once I found the water suddenly grow less and less, and finally it died away altogether, telling me that my friend the miller had exhausted his water supply, and

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that the game, as far as that afternoon was concerned, was up.

In fishing these tiny streams I always preferred a short stumpy quill float; a friend of mine, who accompanied me once or twice to a similar brook, used to use a very small bullet and no float, but I fancied more than once that he handicapped himself sadly, as in using a small leger bullet he had to throw the bait direct to where he wanted it, and chance getting it hung up over the jungle of bushes; whereas in many cases the float could be swum and worked down an extra yard or two under the very fastnesses, where the bullet could not be pitched. Tackle should always be fine, but strong, chub gut being about right. Wasp grubs and a bunch of gentles are also good baits for this fishing, but I always fancied when the fresh water ran from the mill the tail end of a lob was decidedly the most attractive. If the water is only an ordinary stream, not affected by the mill water, then wasp grubs and caddis baits would be better, reserving worms for a clouded water after heavy rains. That afternoon my basket contained seventeen trout, weighing eleven pounds on the miller's scales—a very good result, when we consider the nature of the tiny stream.

In all probability some of my readers know of a similar place, where at first sight they would not dream of catching trout or anything else. I can call to mind half a dozen similar brooks. Once in particular an old friend rated me soundly when I took him to one of them for a day's sport; but he altered his tune at night. If by chance there is a good river in the immediate vicinity—be it trout stream, or chub, or dace, or roach, with an outlet from or inlet into it—the tiny little brook that looks so insignificant might astonish him.

On that evening, after leaving the biggest half of the fish at the miller's house, I went home fully satisfied with my outing, and had a dish of trout left that would compensate the most exacting of men—and I longed that the time would soon come round when the friendly miller would again send me his welcome note.

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CHAPTER V

A WINTER'S DAY DOWN THE LOWER TRENT

(THOUGHTS AND REFLECTIONS)

A winter's storm—Clifton and Dunham, on the Lower Trent—"The Bridge Inn," Dunham—Swims, and what fish are found therein—Barbel and bream—Hudson, the professional.

"The breeze comes sighing through the shady wood,
And lonely in the vale a peaceful angler stood."

SO sang the poet, and to the ordinary observer who looks at it from a fisherman's standpoint it does seem to suggest a scene of quiet contentment and rural simplicity. The above lines brought vividly before my mental vision the scene that I once looked upon on a dull December day some years ago. The breeze which the poet said was "sighing through the shady wood" was at that particular time sweeping down the vale with furious whirling gusts, bringing with it a sting more bitter and still more bitter with each succeeding blast. That breeze was sighing with a vengeance through a shady wood that crowned the slopes of a hill, and the "lonely vale" in which the "peaceful angler stood" stretched away on either hand, unbroken save for the long, peculiar hill that seemed to shut in and turn the course of the river, which just here made a long semicircular sweep, which sweep only ended at the very foot of the frowning cliff itself.

This stretch of the Trent between Clifton Hill and Dunham Bridge, and for the matter of that all down the river to Laneham, Rampton, and Torksey, and higher up towards Sutton, Meering, and Carlton, has been a favourite spot with Sheffield and other anglers as long as I can

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remember the place, and doubtless long before that. I do not know why it should, seeing that it was an old-world place, untainted as yet with the smoke of railway trains. The two nearest stations at that time were Tuxford and Torksey, both of them some six miles distant in very nearly opposite directions. Perhaps it was the very isolation of the place that constituted its chief charm in the eyes of those sport-loving Sheffield "blades"; or perhaps we must look for the reason in the, at times, splendid roach fishing that they enjoyed in its waters. Be that as it may, and despite the fact of the railway stations being six miles away, as soon as the first grey streaks of dawn appeared on the eastern horizon on nearly any Sunday morning during the summer season a whole troop of these horny-handed grinders and cutlers could be seen dotted on the banks at intervals.

One Saturday evening I dropped in to see mine host of "The Bridge Inn," and it appeared that these men, when trade was brisk, started on Saturday afternoon, walking the long distance from Torksey or Tuxford on purpose to be ready for the early morning. That evening there must have been quite forty of them in the house, and I wondered wherever the good landlady would stow that lot away for the night; but I expect a comfortable hayloft would not have been despised. Those were the good old times, as far as that small village was concerned; but slackness of trade in later years thinned down the visitors, and the banks of the river were nothing like so crowded. But the fishing has not suffered, and anglers stood a better chance of getting to the best swims.

But at the time of which I am writing it was no peaceful summer scene that greeted my eyes; to the right hand lay Clifton Hill, a spot that always appealed to me as having a past history, and a lot of old memories and traditions clinging to its worn church and old-fashioned houses. Antiquarians tell us that the red cliff near the Trent has produced, at one time or another, many interesting relics of bygone days, and they speak of a castle that

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used to stand upon the hill; but there are no ruins or signs to-day that such a castle ever existed.

At one time the villagers used to have free access to the ferry across the river, and in return for this great privilege the ferryman and his dog (but why the dog should be such an important factor in this settlement, history does not tell us) could claim the very poor compensation of a dinner at the vicarage every Christmas day. On that occasion the vicar's dog was with all ceremony turned out of doors, while the ferryman's animal was with all pomp and circumstance feasted within; at the same time the ferryman himself used to receive from the people of the village "a prime loaf of bread," as the old writing says.

But to resume my narrative. On the other side of the river, opposite Clifton, stood a clump of trees that marked the place known as Marnham Ferry. On that day those trees stood bare and gaunt; the wind whistled and groaned through them with a mournful cadence, like some spirit in purgatorial agony, while they swayed and bent in the ever-freshening gale. Farther down stream, on the Dunham side of the river, was a capital row of bushes reaching some considerable distance, with a good depth, and a capital stream running. From under those roots and fastnesses I have had more than one splendid bag of chub; a boat was necessary to fish those boughs, as the narrow bank on which they grew flanked a long and fairly wide stretch of weedy backwater. But that day it looked uninviting enough; the waves were breaking under the boughs with sullen, gurgling splashes, driven there by the strong cross wind; and the white horses that crested those waves were hissing with every roll. Still farther down stream, towards an old turnpost, the water was stiller, but looked black and sullen, the patches of snow that had drifted up the opposite bank heightening the effect of this somewhat; while the mass of trees on the slope of the hill behind were rolling like the waves of a tempestuous sea. A threatening bank of clouds, through which some sullen shafts of red occasionally shot, hung over the western sky, while ever and anon the fierce

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gusts of wind that swept down from the higher lands threatened to penetrate every crack and crevice of the clothing. Altogether a very bad afternoon for sport.

I had started out in the morning hoping to get a bit of chub fishing, but found it no go at all, so to keep the blood in circulation fell back on spinning, a dozen very fine fresh sprats having been included in the bag when starting. A brace of jack, about nine pounds the two, from the neighbourhood of the old turnpost before mentioned, rewarded my efforts; but it took nearly three hours' hard work to accomplish even that small result. I thought it was about time to pack up; and this proceeding nearly chilled me to the bone. As I took a final look round, nothing, as far as I could see, relieved the general dreariness of the outlook. In front I discovered the cliff that so abruptly shut off the view and overshadowed the depths of the river; farther round the iron bridge that spanned the Trent just there loomed up black against the still blacker sky. "Very cold, very tired, and very hungry," could truthfully be written of me then, and I still had to face the distance and the chill winds that separated me from the cosy corner and warm comfort of the private parlour of "The Bridge Inn," Dunham, then kept by very old friends of mine, ex-Sergeant Dixon and his wife, from whom I was certain to have the very warmest of welcomes. They were a kindly village couple, of whom I have nothing but pleasant remembrances.

I routed out, on passing his cottage, old Charlie Hudson, the Dunham professional fisherman; and together we enjoyed a blazing fire, a pot of tea, and a huge plate of smoking hot home-fed ham and eggs. Speedily forgetting the trials and discomforts of the afternoon, within an hour, under the influence of all those good things, I was rashly pledging myself to go with old friend Charlie, and perchance have to brave them again, the next day. That wild afternoon, one of the very worst I was ever out in, upset me more than any other I can ever remember, and my friends always gave me the character of being no chicken when any sort of fishing was about.

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The locality used to be a capital one for the general holiday angler, and is now, for aught I know, particularly during the summer and autumn months. The wandering fisherman has a wide field to roam over; he could go for miles up or down from Dunham without let or hindrance, except in one or two private stretches and backwaters. This fine district of the Trent contained fish of nearly every sort except trout and grayling. Barbel, chub, bream, pike, perch, dace, roach, eels, and flounders were the principal fish found, and nearly any quantity of swims could be operated on from the bank. Of course, a boat was more than useful to fish the boughs for chub, or to try the buttresses and holes round the bridge, under which some very large barbel were wont to congregate; or if you went farther afield to try the deep and heavy midstream runs, so beloved of the fish just named. And it was also impossible to fish that tremendously deep hole under the very shadow of the cliff, known as Dunham Dubs, without a boat. This hole was between thirty and forty feet deep at that time, and contained huge quantities of very large bream. I have known as many as two hundredweight of fine fish to be taken from it in a single day. Hudson kept his houseboat during the season close to that hole, constantly baiting it with all sorts of things—lobworms, however, predominating. One season he put twenty thousand large worms in before he took out a single fish.

It was in this hole that I learned the use of a slider float, one of those aids to fishing a deep swim with a twelve-foot rod that is indispensable. My own slider float was made of three large pelican quills, whipped and bound together, and ringed, as usual, with one tiny ring at bottom and a larger one near the top. This float would carry twelve or fourteen large swan shots and a very heavy pike lead, which was not one whit too much for the stream we had to fish. Sometimes when fishing that hole in the dusk of a summer's evening we would hook, and some odd times land, a tremendous eel, weighing five or six pounds; and once my old friend got a pike on his worm tackle that

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weighed 27½ lb.—the largest from that river during his fifty years' experience.

A little higher up stream above the bream hole, and stretching for a couple of hundred yards or so, was a series of barbel water of the very first rank, and some very fair bags of those fish were occasionally made. One summer I saw quantities leaping from the water all down that stretch; Hudson and I got twenty one day—about the best bag of barbel I ever had, as they ranged in weight from eight pounds down to three and a half. Roach and dace swims could be found almost anywhere, within easy reach of the bank in very many cases. That succulent fish, the flounder, in those days was also fairly plentiful there, the sandy slacks and shallows often yielding a bag of two or three dozen during a single sitting; but those fish got scarcer and scarcer every year before I left, and the last season or two I spent on the Trent a take of them was the exception rather than the rule as in former years. I hear from friends down there that those fish are again showing signs of their presence in increased numbers, which is good news, as they are both sporting, when taken on a rod and fine tackle, and also a table delicacy of a high order.

During the season the water is more or less affected by the tide. Sometimes, although it is a long distance from the Humber, the water will rise three or four feet, and run pretty swiftly upwards; at other times it scarcely rises six or eight inches, and the stream hardly stops. During very high water times it was no good fishing out in mid stream when the water was running upwards. The sandy slacks and shallows, that had no more than eighteen inches or two feet of water on them during low water times, would now have four or five feet for a couple of hours or so, and very often more roach and dace would be taken during this time than all the rest of the day put together. I have fished a tide when the water has been running both ways, up and down, and caught them both ways, until the water nearly ran down to its old level.

Those long reaches of the Trent that stretched round

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from Clifton to a mile or more below Dunham Bridge were very diversified in their character, deep holes and quiet corners succeeding each other; while heavy runs and deep eddies would charmingly alternate. Capital spinning water could be found in several places, especially that stretch from the old turnpost and even higher up, down to Dunham Bridge; and the fly fisherman also for chub and dace could find plenty of shallow water on which to ply his craft.

The water, when I used to fish the place so frequently, was mostly free, except a long backwater on the Dunham side of the river known as the "Old Trent." This was rented by a Sheffield gentleman, but I fancy he preserved it more for the wild duck and snipe shooting than for its fishing, although the latter was pretty good.

On the opposite side of the river, close under the shadow of the wooded cliff, and hidden away so that the casual observer and the stranger would not suspect its presence, was another long narrow sheet, or succession of sheets, of water, that rejoiced in the name of the "Bumbledyke." Hudson and I one day got a brace of jack going seventeen pounds the two out of it; but it was mostly choked up with weeds, and difficult to get a bait in and a fish out when hooked. "The Bridge Inn" in those days was a capital place to stay at, the fare being good and very reasonable, and the accommodation also was good and cheap. A fortnight could very easily have been spent without a very serious expenditure, and the quiet old-world character of the place would charm the visitor. Our wandering angler might do worse than explore this noble old river, and make Dunham-on-Trent his head-quarters.

I remember, many years ago now, a gentleman writing to ask me if I could recommend a very quiet place where he could enjoy a bit of fishing and a lot of rest for two or three weeks. I sent him down to "The Bridge Inn," and he was so charmed with the fishing, the place, and my old friend Charlie Hudson, that he prolonged his stay over six weeks, and thanked me heartily for sending him down

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there, although he never fished for anything except barbel, and only then when the fisherman reported the fish "on."

Poor old Charlie Hudson, for more than fifty years the professional there, has long since joined the great majority; he lived to reach the great age of eighty-six. He was tall and straight as a pine, thin and rugged, but with a kindly smile and a still kinder heart. There may be other changes in the locality—fresh faces and hosts I make no doubt preside at "The Bridge Inn"—but the river runs down the selfsame valley, and the fish are still the same sport as of yore. Bad trade at Sheffield and other industrial centres may have thinned the visitors, but still the old-world character of the place, I fancy, has been maintained, and the chances of sport still the same in its general features. I think the great bulk of the fishing is still free; anyhow, I never heard anything to the contrary.

There may be other men who have taken Hudson's place, who are as willing as he was to show the best places for sport, and to pilot them, as the old man did me on the morning after that day of frost, storm, and wind so long ago. My notebook says it was no sort of a bag to boast about —two brace of three-pound chub, with pith and brains, and a six-pound jack caught spinning. Nevertheless, the memory of the day of storm and stress which preceded that take will always remain.

Since penning the above I have received a long and interesting letter from a Lincolnshire coroner, who is well known to Grimsby anglers under the nom-de-plume of "The Lincolnshire Clodhopper."

This experienced fisherman has made the Lower Trent his objective for his annual holiday for a long series of years; and he tells me there is now a railway station at Fledboro, which is only one and a half mile from Marnham ferry. This new line is an extension of the Lancashire, Derbyshire, and East Coast Railway. Mr. Mason, the angler in question, recommends the "Brownlow Arms," close to the ferry, and within very easy distance of some of the

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finest barbel, bream, chub, and roach swims that are to be found in the Lower Trent.

I should say this station is about in the centre of all those grand deeps and swims stretching from Sutton Holmes down to Dunham Bridge. There were barbel swims there from nine to sixteen feet deep; strong stream, and large stones and boulders very much in evidence; those barbel used to fight it out with us for a longer period than they did anywhere else that I can remember, the strong stream assisting to prolong the contest. Hudson one day got seven in two hours, weighing 42¼ lb. I fancy he was fighting those fish nearly every bit of the time, never having to wait more than a minute before having a fresh opponent on.

Once a huge catch of chub going 85 lb. was taken on one day, several of the fish going 5 lb. each, or nearly so; and once an extraordinary take of dace was had; during three days no fewer than a hundred and thirty of those fish were landed, nine of which averaged 14 oz. apiece; a most extraordinary weight for Trent dace. Mr. Mason can vouch for the accuracy of this.

Crow Park Station, on the G.N.R., and Fledboro Station, as above, are the nearest to the Lower Trent fishing places named in this chapter.

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CHAPTER VI

THE LOWER TRENT

(PISCATORIALLY AND HISTORICALLY CONSIDERED)

Early recollections of the Lower Trent—Old Trent celebrities—Old times among the fish—Ancient history of the Trent—Floods and frosts—The thirty fish of the Trent.

WHETHER we look at this river from a mere fisherman's standpoint, or whether we look at it from a broader or more historical point of view, it is full of interest for everybody—the tourist, the antiquarian, and the naturalist, as well as the wandering angler. Is not this district famous in song, legend, and story? The historian has connected it with some of the earliest and most thrilling episodes in English history; the poet has sung its praises in deathless language; while the story-teller has woven around its waters and its villages stories based on old legends that will live as long as Englishmen live to watch its gliding stream and its leaping fish.

Over thirty years have slipped off time's reel since I had my introduction to that grand old river, and received my first lessons in the famous Nottingham style of stream fishing from men who were as famous in their day and generation as the very river itself—men who, alas! have gone to that bourne from which no traveller returns. At that time the fishing from Newark down to Torksey and beyond was very fair indeed, although a few years later it began to show signs of deterioration; then I had the great advantage of having angling friends who knew every inch of the water, and had constantly fished it for twenty, thirty, and in one or two cases for even forty years. I need only mention the names of such well-known Trent men as

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Thomas Bentley, James Chatterton, Frank Sims, Andrew Broughton, Thomas Sunman, William Bailey, George Holland; Owen, the old Newark tackle dealer; Corby, the rod-maker, who lived in the old Northgate Almshouses, that used to stand close to where the brewery offices now are; not to mention other well-known working-men anglers;—to show that the information I was able to glean in those days of the fish and fishing in the river was varied and extensive.

Among the better-class anglers of that time, mention may be made of Dr. Waterworth, Mr. Cafferata, Henry Norledge, Harry Weaver, and Mr. Hibbert; every one of these famous anglers has now joined the great majority. There are a few of the old school left, but not many; perhaps Robert Dale, the old verger of the parish church, is the oldest survivor of the old brigade.

It must be more than thirty years since the Newark and Muskham Fishery Association was first formed to take over and preserve the waters, that up to then had been rented by Dr. Waterworth and Mr. Cafferata. Sunman used to look after the water a bit for the gentlemen just named, and I have heard him say that the place swarmed with all sorts of coarse fish, chub and pike being especially numerous. It was no unusual thing for his patrons to get a dozen or more of the latter fish, running up to fifteen pounds apiece, during a single afternoon; a favourite place for big fish being in the eddy opposite Crankley Point, just at the junction of the two rivers. At that time there was a famous run of water containing quantities of large chub alongside an old willow holt that stretched from that point up stream in the main river, to the brick and stone bridges that carry the Great Northern Railway across the valley. Under those old boughs there was an average depth of five or six feet of water, with a sandy bottom and a nice steady stream. Many were the bags of fish of nearly all kinds that Sunman captured in those days of long ago from there.

The willow holt has long since disappeared, the stream itself has silted up, and changed completely in its character;

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no one who knew it then would now recognize it as being the same place. On the opposite side of the main river were some famous shallows that used to contain a fair sprinkling of grayling. I can just remember one or two fly fishermen who used to wade for those fish there; but even then the glories of the place had waned, and it was only occasionally that a brace of grayling were brought to creel. I believe they have now disappeared altogether from that part of the Trent.

The piece of water known as the Dyke, running from the bottom locks under the iron suspension bridge and joining the main river at Crankley Point, was in those days a famous haunt for coarse fish, particularly roach and bream, the stream being nothing like so rapid as it was in the main river; also it was of a good average depth, and fringed along the sides by flags and bushes, this no doubt being the cause of the abundance of those two fish. I have heard the old anglers say that forty or more years ago any of them who cared to fish there had only to go down after tea on any afternoon in August or September, with a handkerchief full of brewer's grains and a handful of stewed wheat or malt, and catch as many roach and bream during the evening as they cared to carry home.

Coming down still later to my own recollection of the same stretch of water, I can remember the Newark and Muskham Fishery Association, to celebrate the taking over of the water and starting the society, fishing a sweepstakes match: one Saturday afternoon I think it was. There were about a score of competitors, and in three hours the winner had something like twenty-eight pounds of fish, while the last man of all had a bag that would be considered a very good average first prize catch nowadays.

Those palmy days have vanished, but whether they will ever return is another question. The streams and eddies lower down the river to Winthorp, with its once famous Corporation fishery; the stream known as the Rundalls, Denman's Marsh, the celebrated Holme waters, right along down to Collingham Wharf and Carlton Ferry, to say

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nothing of the Meerings and Sutton Holmes, were waters much patronized by that famous Nottingham angler William Bailey and his equally famous friend George Holland. The chub that swarmed down all those reaches at that time were something to be remembered; it was no uncommon occurrence for those two fishermen to be out for a week together, living on the proceeds of the sale of their fish to the neighbouring villagers; very frequently they would get two or three four-pounders out of one hole in as many swims. Bailey and myself got as many as from twenty to forty pounds of chub during a single day; and once I knew forty-two chub to be taken in an afternoon from one meadow alone. Most assuredly we shall never see the like of that again, although there is some talk of the Navigation Company building a new lock and weir somewhere opposite the village of Cromwell, which will hold up a lot more water and improve the fishing prospects to a very great extent; because the constant dredging of the channel, and the drawing away of the water from the banks and bushes, has spoiled the fishing without any doubt.

The famous hole at the corner of Foottits Meadow, between Collingham Wharf and Carlton, used to yield very big bags of bream; but I hardly ever hear anything about that place now. Down those lower waters barbel used to be met with, sometimes in considerable quantities, a Newark angler named Robert Wells once getting no fewer than a hundred and twenty-three in a single day. I thought the days of huge bags of barbel were past; but Councillor David Slater, fishing in the Muskham, or Holme waters, as recently as August, 1905, got as many as ninety-seven in one day, and something like three hundred of those fish within ten days, so hopes still run high.

All down that reach opposite Carlton, and past the mill to the corner known as the Sentry Box, is some capital deep water, where barbel are sometimes got. A good deal of this water for miles and miles is free, Sutton-on-Trent being a good place for any one to make their head-quarters. From here they can go down stream as far as they can walk,

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"WE TRIED THOSE BOUGHS'

A THAMES BEAUTY SPOT, LOOKING FROM WARGRAVE MARSH

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and find good water nearly everywhere; while by crossing the ferry at the Meerings they have a long range and choice up stream. I might add that miles of this water can be spun over, the fisherman taking care to select the bends and corners where the stream is a lot steadier; pike being occasionally got of a fairly good size. I remember two that were taken on sprats from the Sentry Box eddy that weighed nineteen pounds and sixteen pounds respectively. Flounder-fishing used to be a favourite game of mine in those days; these fish swarmed nearly everywhere then, and a catch during the summer was almost a certainty.

But I must now turn from the piscatorial to the historical consideration of the Lower Trent, as this will be very interesting to intending visitors. There is no question but that this entire district was once occupied by the Romans, the site of one of their principal camps being fixed at the village of Brough, some distance from the Trent. The four centuries of their abode in this land was the era during which our ancestors passed from barbarism to civilization; then danger at home forced the Romans to abandon their distant possessions, and so they withdrew from Britain. It was supposed that the huge Roman bridge that crossed the Trent, and connected the two great camps at Brough and Southwell, crossed the river at Winthorp; in fact, one of my authorities says that once, during a very low water and an extremely dry summer, the foundations were seen there. But some years ago, during dredging operations, the remains of the old bridge were found near Cromwell, several miles lower down stream; so the foundations seen, according to the old writer, were not those of the old Roman bridge.

The straggling village of Torksey and the ruins of its castle have long been objects of interest to the wandering Trent angler. The place itself appears to be very ancient; but the castle, contrary to all seeming, does not enjoy any very great antiquity. The great historian, the venerable Bede, refers to the place as "Tiovulfingacester." At the time of the Norman Conquest it was called a city and

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had two hundred and thirteen burgesses, with a charter of privileges. It must have been a considerable place in those days, because a burgess was a very important person in that far-away time; most likely many of them had a whole retinue of followers. In return for the charter of privileges the citizens were obliged to convey the king's ambassadors to York, which they did by navigating the Trent, the Humber, and the Ouse. The construction of the first waterway between Torksey and Lincoln has been ascribed to Henry the First, but this is doubtful, as there is more than sufficient evidence to show that this work owed both its origin and completion to the Romans.

About the year 1000 A.D. a Scandinavian coiner named Thorcatel lived in the place, and later on three religious houses were established there. The ruins now known as the castle are thought to be only a part of a family residence belonging to the Talbots. During the civil war this was garrisoned by the troops of the Parliamentary army, until they were expelled by the Cavaliers from Newark in August, 1645.

There is a ferry at Littleborough, near Torksey, which is said to be the oldest in the kingdom; it was in use as early as A.D. 138, and is in all probability of Roman origin. The district round there suffered greatly from frequent attacks of the Danes; in fact, the very spelling of the names of the villages proves that it was finally subdued and taken possession of by them.

When King Alfred restored the Saxon power he forced his Danish subjects in the midland counties to dwell in five towns, commonly known as "the five burghs," of which Lincoln and Nottingham were two.

Two hundred years later Gainsborough, a town some distance below Torksey, on the Trent, was for a time the abode of Sweyn, King of Denmark. He had landed there from a fleet of vessels gorgeously equipped. The old chronicles describe with pride how their ropes were purple, while their masts and sails shone with gold; and on the banks of the Trent, not far from that town, traces of the Danish camp

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remain. Sweyn, the King, closed his career of guilt in a drunken brawl by being stabbed to death; thus Gainsborough, the scene of his first success, became not long afterwards that of his ignoble end. The well-known rebuke given by King Canute to his courtiers is said to have been uttered while watching the hygre, or tidal wave, as it swept up the river past Gainsborough Castle.

Coming down to the time when England was divided into seven small kingdoms, we find that this district of the Trent was the scene of very troublous events. From A.D. 630 to A.D. 665 it was conquered no less than three times, and reconquered three times in the same period. It had six hundred years of Saxon domination, and later on still we find Hotspur, in the words of the immortal Shakespeare, threatening to have the Trent dammed up and its course changed, as this river cut him from the best of all his land.

One of the most interesting villages down the Trent is Holme, a village that was visited by the plague in A.D. 1666. This same year Newark itself lost one-third of its inhabitants by the same awful visitation. There was a little room over the porch of Holme Church that was commonly called Nan Scott's Chamber; this old woman, who took refuge from the plague therein, carried sufficient provisions with her to last over several weeks, and did not dare to leave her hiding-place except to watch from a small turret the sad funeral processions of her old friends. Tradition tells us that when compelled at last to go out in search of more food, she was so horrified to find the village deserted by all except herself and one other person, that she returned to the chamber and there spent the rest of her life.

This village also has a singular story connected with the famous highwayman Dick Turpin. It is said that in his rides from London to York he used to rest and shelter in a small low cottage that stood on the Newark road. This cottage was about a mile from the Great North Road, and yet separated from it by the Trent. Probably the very seclusion of the place, combined with its proximity to an

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easy ford, would make it a retreat not unworthy of the caution for which Turpin was so famous.

At one time the Trent separated the villages of Holme and Langford, but now the river separates Muskham from Holme. The old writer Thoroton says this was owing to a very high flood, which utterly changed the channel of the river; its old watercourse close to Langford Church being still quite obvious. A very old man, who died more than forty years ago at Holme, left it on record that he could remember a barge sinking in the river on a spot that is now planted as an orchard, and which is at least a hundred and fifty yards from the stream of to-day. This frequent changing of its course seems to be one of the peculiarities of the Trent in this district, and has been the subject of much comment by those versed in the matter.

History speaks of a drought lasting from March to August, 1354, and of another in 1541, which reduced the Trent to a small straggling stream, and much cattle died of thirst. On the other hand, there is a record of rain falling continuously from midsummer to Christmas, 1346, the resulting consequences of flood and death being most disastrous. In 1683 a like occurrence of flood, produced by the sudden melting of the ice, led to the total destruction of Newark Bridge. The memorable flood of February, 1795, was in like manner caused by a quick thaw after seven weeks of frost; the whole valley of the Trent was then a scene of desolation, and barges laden with coal were navigated across the fields and lanes to the village of Collingham, a pretty considerable distance from the river.

I might just mention that the six months' rain which fell in the year 1346 was responsible for two of the most mighty upheavals that this district or even this country has ever seen. That huge rainfall was not intermittent, but continuous day and night for six months, without once ceasing for even a single hour. The crops rotted on the ground, and could not be gathered; the calves and the lambs died wholesale; famine gaunt and dire stared every one in the face—rich and poor alike, all suffered. But

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worse was to follow all down that Trent valley; aye, not only there, but in every other valley in fair England. The spring and summer succeeding that long rain was, we are told by the old church records, the loveliest that this country had ever seen; but the fierce sun beating down on that rotten and steaming earth sent up a pestilence, as if the very ground itself was suffering with the foulest of sore boils. That was the year of the Black Death, when men died like flies. It is put on record that in scores of villages not one adult was left alive; dead bodies rotted by the wayside for want of men to bury them; not one who was struck by this foul disease ever recovered. The barons and the old feudal lords went down in heaps; the iron fetters that bound the poorer people of that day in a death-like grip were relaxed for the want of those people who could keep them locked. It wanted some great upheaval to snap those shackles, and here it was; the Black Death had done its work, and paved the way for that great uprising that a few years afterwards made the working people of those valleys the freest in the land; but it was only a remnant of the people who lived to see it.

Science seems to have grappled with this question of floods nowadays, so it is very seldom that the results are so appalling. Improved weir tackle and an elaborate system of drainage keep the water within bounds. Sometimes it has been drained off almost before it reaches the river; but all this business has not improved the fishing, the old days of long-continued cloudy water being more conducive to sport.

But I am old enough to remember several of these floods—one in particular, during the year 1875, that was very disastrous to the dwellers in the valley; the water flooded streets, houses, and factories, some low-lying cottages in the neighbourhood of Dunham having the water as high as the bedroom windows, the lower rooms being completely submerged. Rescue-parties were out in every direction, food having to be taken to isolated places in boats. Rats, rabbits, and hares were picked out of the highest hedges,

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where they had crawled out of the way of the flood. In many places only the tops of the trees were visible above the waste of waters; and I remember standing on a main bridge, when the flood was at its worst, watching the victims as they were swept downwards—now a pig; then a sheep; anon a cow or calf; and finally I saw a black horse, with a set of silver-mounted harness, being borne on that resistless tide down to the sea.

The origin of the name given to this river seems to be lost in the mists of antiquity; some associate it with "Trente," meaning thirty, and point out that thirty streams flow into the Trent during its course; that thirty abbeys stood upon its banks; and that thirty different fish inhabit its waters. Well, this may be so, but I never could quite make out those thirty fish. An old authority, writing about two and a half centuries ago, gives a list of twenty-nine, including two or three sea-fish and also a shell-fish; but, strange to say, this old writer omitted the two fish that stand one at each end of the list, the largest and the smallest in the series, viz. the sturgeon and the stickleback. Here is the list as given by that old authority, with the above two added: Sturgeon, salmon, trout, grayling, pike, perch, ruffe, barbel, chub, rudd, roach, bream, gudgeon, dace, bleak, carp, tench, burbolt, eel, lamprey, flounder, miller's thumb, stone loach, stickleback, minnow, and smelt. These make twenty-six; the others in the list are, I make no doubt, in the river sometimes, but whether we can class them as genuine Trent fish is another matter; they are lampurne—this sounds very doubtful to me—sprat, turbot, mussel, and crayfish. Naturalists say the last one is not a fish; but perhaps the last two served very well as fish to our forefathers. There is a list thirty-one strong, counting them all in—shell-fish, sea-fish, doubtfuls, and all.

Taking the Trent all round I do not consider it to be such a good fishing river as the Thames; the latter is more diversified in its character, the fishing is easier, and I fancy it is better stocked, most classes of fish in it being of a greater average weight. The Thames has very long, deep,

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and sluggish stretches, a good deal more than the Trent has; deep, sluggish reaches on the Trent being the exception rather than the rule. It is very seldom that carp and tench are taken from the main waters of the midland river; the Thames, on the other hand, frequently produces good ones, and this can be set down to the difference between the two streams. It is also a good roach from the Trent if he weighs from one pound to a pound and a half, and these are only few and far between; in fact, out of ninety of those fish weighed in this season for specimen prizes in a good Trent fishing club, the third prize was taken with a roach weighing less than a pound; while, on the other hand, many of the Thames angling clubs fix the weight at a pound and a half before a fish can be weighed in at all; the character of the latter stream suiting the roach admirably.

Then again, taking the two rivers all round, the scenery on the Trent does not compare favourably with the Thames. There are certain stretches of the Upper Trent that are beautiful, I will admit; but for sheer beauty I have never seen anything to beat certain reaches of the Thames. Go along by Clieveden Woods, or Henley, or Marlow, and a dozen other spots I could name, when the slopes and hills are clad in their summer garb, and you will agree that its equal would be hard to find. But I love the old Trent and its sparkling shallows. I lived long within sound of its roaring weirs and its gurgling eddies, and know it better than a man knows his most intimate friend. Those deeps and streams would talk to me; the nodding willows would beckon me on; and I could talk back to them in their own language. The very sandpipers even, that flitted from sandbank to sandbank, would show me where the fish swam thickest.

I have slept by the side of it, with nothing but the sky for a coverlet; have seen it in all its varied moods; have been lulled to sleep on its banks by the magnificent midnight song of the mock nightingale; have woke up and seen nothing except a wide rolling sea of summer mist, stretching across that flat land as far as eye could see. The

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frogs would croak in sympathy; the very barbel would leap with joy far above the surface, just to show that they were as lighthearted as I. The murmuring stream and the cooing wood-pigeons would sing a lullaby, at early sunrise and late sunset, that the fondest mother never crooned to her restless infant. Ah, yes; twenty years on one river is not wiped from memory's slate, as is a child's forgotten drawing; but it lives, and will live, until that unseen but relentless hand beckons us across the gloomy borderland.

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CHAPTER VII

A CHRISTMAS DISH

(WINTER CHUB FISHING)

A winter's morning—Chub as a winter fish—Pith and brains—The chubbing outfit—Fishing the swims—What I found of interest.

WINTER chub fishing may not appeal to the angler who considers sport to be nothing more nor less than lying at full length on the banks of some river trying to shade himself from the rays of a scorching sun.

If there was one sport more than another that I used to delight in, that one was to find myself on the banks of a good running river, with the water in splendid order; a good supply of bait, the weather clear, crisp, and with a suspicion of frost, and the chub inclined to my way of thinking. There is no branch of angling in all the catalogue of the varied styles that brings out the capabilities, the skill, and the dexterity in handling his tools more, than does this stream fishing with a float for chub.

It was a typical Christmas morning of the good old-fashioned sort; a slight misty haze, aided by a frost, had clothed the trees and hedges in a fantastic garb of glittering, scintillating white. Scarcely a breath of wind was blowing, but what there was brought with it in the face of the early morning sportsman a taste of the coldness of the north. The sun was just rising above the spur of a range of low hills that flanked the south-eastern horizon, and gleamed with a dull misty red, throwing a series of strange lights and shadows across its track, and lighting up in a brilliant silvery sheen the tops of the distant trees. Underfoot the grass crunched with every step, and all along the river's

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edge, and clinging lovingly to the lowest twigs of the overhanging scattered bushes, was a thin skim of ice, that swayed and dipped with every swirl of the current.

It most certainly was not a morning for a butterfly fisherman to be out, whose idea of fishing was green trees and leaves, to be lulled into sleep by a lazy drone from a thousand insects, under a cloudless sun. I was a bit younger and more hardy on the day that I have in my mind's eye just now, and rather gloried in the beauties of a keen winter's morn, and considered a day's chubbing under the conditions of that day the very beau-ideal of a sportsman's life; for be it known to all and sundry that our leather-mouthed friend the chub is the sporting fish *par excellence* of a keen and frosty day, pike and grayling not excepted, by me, at any rate.

I had left the people of the house that Christmas morn—the women folk, at any rate—a clear field and no favour to prepare the turkey, the plum-pudding, and the various indigestible items that go to make up that time-honoured meal known as the Christmas dinner. Strict orders and sundry injunctions had been given as to the time to return, and an hour later I stood in the valley of the grand old river Trent, watching the wintry sun climbing slowly up the distant hill, and lighting up the whole landscape in a glorious halo of dancing white. The river flowed along, curling under the roots of those old bushes, ever and anon swirling with a gurgling splash as an eddy was sucked underneath the hollow clay bank, then swirled on again until finally lost under the dark shadows of a distant bough. It was extremely inviting, in spite of its somewhat wintry aspect. The water was just tinged with a very faint colour: a stone on the bottom could be detected about two feet down.

Chub are a fish that can be found in a suitable place during very cold and frosty weather, even when the place is not more than three or four feet deep. It is a mistake to think that chub can only be found in very deep water during the cold weather; I have found them at all depths,

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when the float had to be fourteen feet away from the hook, and when it was only two feet away. This particular part of the river, under the boughs and overhanging banks, varied from two to five feet in depth, and contained some pretty fair fish, as previous visits and experiences had more than once clearly proved, and I looked forward to an enjoyable, not to say an exciting, time.

If there is one bait more than another that I swear by for the fish now under notice, when weather is cold and frosty, that bait is bullock's pith, raw, for the hook, and bullock's brains, boiled hard and finely minced, for ground bait, if that particular operation can be called ground-baiting. It was rather a difficult job, getting that bait on Christmas Eve, but by great good luck a butcher friend obliged me with a set. The brains were well washed and cleaned, all the blood and impurities being carefully removed; they were then tied up in a square of calico and boiled for nearly an hour, until they became tough and hard. The pith itself, which I suppose I need not say is the spinal cord of the beast, was skinned, divided into short ropes as it were, and well washed and cleaned. This is all that is required; the inner fine skin is useful for holding the bait more firmly on the hook, the coarse, rough outside skin only being removed.

I have always considered that chub fishing down the streams, and under the roots and boughs in the Nottingham style, is one of the easiest and most delightful methods of angling; there is no need for all the elaborate preparation that a day among the roach, or bream, or the barbel entails. Your whole outfit, except the rod and landing handle, can be carried in a haversack slung across the shoulders. No huge bags of ground-bait are necessary; no niceties of detail such as are required in some branches of bottom fishing need be troubled about, so long as your tackle is suitable and fished in a proper manner.

Besides, what can be more enjoyable than to wander along, trying this eddy or that overhanging bank, or yonder submerged bough, ever and anon with an eye to the beauties

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of the wintry landscape, or the wild life of the fields, trees, and hedgerows. You can take the word of one who has been in constant contact with Nature in all its varied moods and seasons, and felt better for the experience. But what is that? A huge swirl nearly in mid-stream, and a couple of small fish leaping right and left, tell me that something else is also on the prowl this Christmas Day. But I must leave him this time, with regrets that my tackle is not suitable for his capture. A windover is poising himself above a thorn bush that is loaded with red berries, and I can hear the alarmed chatter of a flock of redwings, who hastily flutter away.

But I must get on, although there is much to instruct and interest one on the banks of that old river. My outfit upon this occasion was of the simplest description, although good. From that day to this I have always built my chub rods after the pattern used by a man who was the very finest exponent of this stream-fishing style that ever wandered down the Trent. I am afraid that chub rod of his made me break the tenth commandment more than once; I fancy it was the first time I saw East India cane as the principal material used in these weapons. It was in three lengths, eleven feet long, with a powerful yet light greenheart top; a balance handle, graduated winch fittings fixed eight inches from the end of the butt. I have seen beautifully finished rods, that for practical fishing were not worth carriage, the winch fittings being fixed within a couple of inches from the butt end. You must have these fittings at least seven or eight inches up the butt, or you cannot fish a stream in comfort, and it is no use trying. This rod weighed about sixteen ounces, with plenty of backbone in it; and yet a good stiff length of East India cane has a certain give and take, that bends gamely to the most determined pulls of a heavy chub; while the centre under the top ferrule and down to the butt has a stopping power about it that would punish the enterprising fish who wanted to get too closely acquainted with the fastnesses of his rooty fortress.

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Nothing beats this cane, with two greenheart tops, mounted with fair-sized safety rings, that stand stiff and rigid from the wood, for a chub and barbel rod; and there is no necessity for it to be more than eleven feet in length, and above all, the rod must not be too slim in its lower lengths. If there is any bend about it, the top should do most of the curving; then it will hit a chub or barbel sharply and promptly, even if the float is twenty yards away when it dipped. The spare top can be carried in the hollow landing handle. The two ferrules on this rod should not be less than ten-sixteenths of an inch on the butt, and five-and a half sixteenths on the centre joint, the top itself tapering to about one-eighth of an inch at the point. And always see that the ring at the extreme point is made of bronzed and hardened steel. I have been rather particular in describing this chub rod, as a very long experience has told me that dozens of rods are used in this fishing which are a source of annoyance rather than a pride and comfort.

The reel also in this stream fishing should be a pattern that is very free and easy running, a three and a half inch centre-pin being the very thing; and this reel should always be kept in good working order, the inside always cleaned and oiled, so that no check, jerk, or hindrance can be communicated to the float during its passage down the stream; for the easier the reel runs the better and cleaner can the swim be fished.

The line also can be fifty yards of white undressed plaited silk, no thicker than necessary, but still capable, when new, of standing a dead strain of six or seven pounds. If it is about the substance of stout sewing thread it will be about right, and it will be advisable before starting out to rub a bit of composite or common candle on it, some twenty yards or so; this will assist in floating the line.

These principal items, with a handy landing-net, comprise the main outfit; the minor requisites, but none the less important, are a couple of pelican quill floats, six or seven inches long, thick and stumpy, capable of carrying six or seven, or even more in some swims, good large split

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shot. A few one-yard lengths of medium gut, sound but not too coarse and heavy, stained a sandy brown, with a dozen No. 4 or 5 Crystal or Carlisle gut hooks, a shade finer than the yard lengths, also stained brown; half a cocoanut shell, or a very small wooden bowl, a pair of sharp scissors, a calico bag for the fish, a small rough towel for wiping the hands, or drying the rod if it gets wet and the line has a tendency to stick to it, and two tins for the pith and brains respectively; the whole packed in a roomy haversack, and the list is complete. This sort of sport is not for a seat basket; everything must be light, handy, and easily carried, as the angler is more or less on the move the whole time. My outfit on that morning was exactly as described. I have gone rather at length into this matter of the tackle, and don't think the time has been wasted, for many of my readers are anxious to know how a fairly successful angler managed to obtain his sport.

It was a morning made for a bit of chub fishing—water in the very best condition, and a stream running that was strong enough to carry the float and tackle onward without check or hindrance. This combination of affairs suggested an enjoyable time, and something to show for it at the end. The first place I tried was along the front of a low overhanging bank, crowned with a couple of bushes whose lowest boughs touched the water some four feet out in the stream: water about the same number of feet deep. Taking out the shell and scissors, I put a bit of the boiled brains about the size of a large walnut in the former and clipped it up as small as ever I could, then putting sufficient water in the shell to cover the brains, well stirred and mixed them together, finally throwing the contents of the shell a few yards higher up stream, so that it would reach midwater or a little deeper by the time it got to the bushes, taking care that it sank a foot or so in front of the boughs and whirled about the stream in tiny fragments. If you are careful where you throw the clipped-up brains, and mix and stir well in a little water, they will sink attractively, exactly where you want them. My pith was in short ropes

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about six or eight inches long, and say half an inch thick. Clipping a bit off about three-quarters of an inch long, I inserted the hook two or three times, until the bait was worked up the shank, and no more long ends hanging loose below the bend than could possibly be helped.

Then I stood well up above the stream, gently tossing out the tackle so that the float would travel some foot or eighteen inches in front of the boughs, with the bait about six inches above the bottom (hitting that distance nicely), taking care that the float did not travel quite so fast as it would have liked to do. This gentle holding back of the float causes the bait to travel a little in advance, and the strike, when a fish takes it, more sharp and direct. Now this is most important in any sort of stream fishing, when the float must of necessity be a good distance below where you stand: the bait must not trail behind the float.

Steadily onward went that float, three-quarters of an inch of its red tip showing above the water, until it reached about the centre of the first bush, when it shot suddenly downwards with that sideways glide so characteristic of a chub bite when he means business. An instantaneous response from the rod point resulted in a heavy plunge and a tackle as fast as a thief in a mill, which no amount of sawing this way and that could loosen. I have heard my old friend, the late Tom Sunman, say that a chub hardly ever takes bait the first time it goes past him; he simply looks out for a convenient stump or root, and next time, seizing the bait, dashes headlong round its chosen retreat. Anyhow, there it was, a bad start; the first swim down had resulted in a lost fish and a broken tackle. Luckily the hook itself only had gone, so it was very easy to repair damages.

That swim being hopelessly disturbed for the time being, I went on to a nice little eddy that curled outside a hollow shelving bank. Repeating the operation that had led to such a disastrous result before, the bag speedily had its first occupant. Ten more minutes' careful trial there failed to add a companion to its lonely condition. The three next swims and more than half an hour's work also failed to

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produce any results whatever, and I began to think that after all the bag would be extremely light.

A little lower down stream, at the corner of a small spinney, was a short length of old decaying camp-shedding, with one or two rather dangerous fasteners projecting from it. This swim was a little deeper than the usual run just there, and it looked so tempting that I determined to give it a little extra ground-bait and a more extended trial, in spite of the fine skims of ice that encrusted every rotten timber and threatened to cut asunder the line if the fish bolted for that particular bit of cover. I got here the best brace of the day, both well over the three pounds, and had two rather bad smashes among those villainous piles, stones, sunken timber, and old iron bolts. About fifty yards lower down stream the bank suddenly rose to a height of nine or ten feet; a heavy flood some time or other had there swept out a little sheltered bay, into which the stream raced with considerable force, forming a beautiful umbrella-like eddy that curled and dimpled round and round, edging a mass of yeast-like foam six inches up the steep bank on the opposite corner. This swim was about three feet deep, and always worth trying. But now a two-pounder only rewarded my very best efforts.

A distant village clock, through the clear winter atmosphere, now chimed out the hour, and reminded me that our Christmas fishing trip was rapidly drawing to a close, and that it would soon be time to pack up and away. There was just time to try the bushes where four hours earlier I had had my first mishap; so I retraced my steps, passing the succession of curling eddies, dipping boughs, old wooden camp-shedding, and rattling streams that had afforded me such delight during the short hours of that winter's day. This time I managed, by exercising a quick and sudden pressure, to land the brother chub to the one hooked and lost in the morning.

A robin beckoned and dipped, as if inviting companionship, from the bush on my left; and a moorhen looked suspiciously from its coign of vantage on a half-submerged

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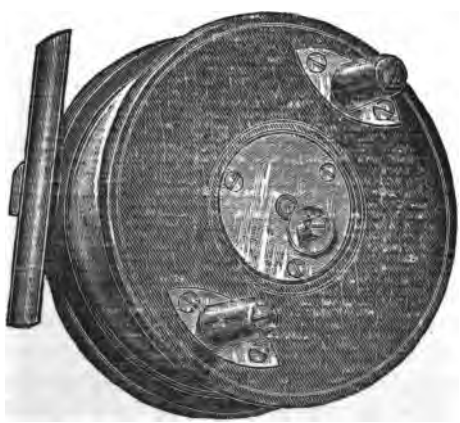
bough to my right. My friend the robin came in for a few scraps of the remaining bullock's brains, and twitted his thanks in a half-starved and jerky manner.

The rooks were homing slowly overhead, a cloud of pigeons were whirling up the slope of a distant wooded hill, and a flock of green plovers were alternately showing their black and white as they turned from side to side during their flight across the meadow on the opposite bank, when I turned away for the hour's homeward march that lay between me and that Christmas dinner, for which the day and its results had given me such an appetite. The bag contained six chub weighing close on fifteen pounds—largest nearly 3½ lb., smallest just under 2 lb. The day's sport also included four smashed-up tackles and two smaller fish returned.

This is only one day selected out of dozens similar, in different seasons, summer and autumn as well as winter; but it gives such an insight into this question of stream fishing with a Nottingham rod and reel that I was tempted to write this chapter somewhat at length.



THE "TRENT OTTER'S" 3½-INCH CENTRE-PIN FOR EASY STREAM FISHING

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CHAPTER VIII

A NEW YEAR'S BAG

(THOUGHTS AND EXPERIENCES ON THE GREAT OUSE)

A New Year's day—On the fringe of the great fens—The "dreamy, breamy Ouse"—The pike-spinning outfit—The flight and how to bait it—Fishing down the streams—A good brace, and a capital wind up.

NEW Year's Day, 1890, was, if my memory can be trusted, a very "squishy squashy" affair, and in direct contradistinction to the glorious Christmas morning described in my last. There had been a considerable fall of snow a few days previously, followed on New Year's Eve by a drizzling rain and a cold thaw, so that all outdoor sports could only be followed amid surroundings of slush and general discomfort.

The damp-laden atmosphere was chilling in the extreme, while underfoot the melting snow penetrated to the inside of even heavy waterproof boots. The river itself was in pretty fair condition, as the snow broth up to then had not discoloured it. I was living in Huntingdon at that time, and that autumn and winter made pike-spinning in those glorious reaches of the river Ouse, that stretched from St. Neots nearly down to St. Ives, a distance of many miles, my especial hobby; and many good fish and heavy bags were my reward, as the weighing-in books of the local angling society will abundantly prove.

Huntingdon and Godmanchester, two small and straggling municipal boroughs, divided only by the river, could lay claim to considerable antiquity; in fact, it is said that the latter place was once the seat of one of the old Danish kings; while a village some little distance beyond God-

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manchester is pointed out as the once residence of one of the rulers when England was split up into the seven kingdoms. The district is also famous as being for some time the dwelling-place of that quaint celebrity Samuel Pepys, whose satirical and oft self-accusing diary is frequently quoted as an authority on events which happened during the stirring and troublous times in which he lived. Hinchingbrooke Castle, now the seat of the Earl of Sandwich, a picturesque and imposing place standing on an eminence overlooking the river, was once the family seat of the Cromwells; while the great protector Oliver Cromwell himself was long connected with the immediate district. The Castle Hill, hard by the Bridges, was once, so tradition says, the stronghold of the famous "Robin Hood," erstwhile the Earl of Huntingdon and outlaw.

The "dreamy, breamy Ouse," as it has been more than once aptly and poetically called, flings its sluggish arms across that wide rolling fenland, moor, meadow, and upland, draining and watering a vast tract of country stretching from Buckinghamshire through several counties, right down to the confines of Norfolk and Suffolk, running through lands very diversified in their general surroundings and character, leaving here and there traces of the work of the old Dutch engineers, who did so much to redeem the fertile soil from the scourge of oft-repeated floods and noisome, pestilent swamps.

There are one or two interesting things connected with the old-time history of this vast district. One—which may become absorbing if you have a turn that way—is to find the causes which led to the foundation of so many wealthy monasteries in a district which even in modern times does not hold out any special and remarkable attractions; and the other thing is that this vast tract of country, intersected by five rivers, and comprising nearly three-quarters of a million acres of the richest land in England, has been reclaimed and drained by successive generations of engineers, until it has become as much the product of art as the kingdom of Holland itself.

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Huntingdon and Godmanchester stand on the edge of what was once described by an old writer as a dismal swamp. One writer, who has interested me more than a little about this district, says :—

" Not many centuries ago this vast tract of 2,000 square miles of land was entirely abandoned to the waters ; forming an immense estuary of the Wash, into which the five rivers Witham, Welland, Glen, Nene, and Ouse discharged the rainfall of the central counties of England. It was an inland sea in winter and a noxious swamp in summer, the waters in many places expanding into settled seas, or meres, swarming with fish and screaming with wild fowl. The more elevated parts were overgrown with tall reeds, which appeared at a distance like fields of waving corn, and they were haunted by immense flocks of starlings, which when disturbed would rise in such numbers as almost to darken the air.

" Into this great dismal swamp the floods descending from the interior were carried, their waters mingling and winding by many devious channels before they reached the sea. They were laden with silt, which became deposited in the basin of the fens. Thus the river beds were from time to time choked up, and the intercepted waters forced new channels through the ooze, wandering across the level and often winding back upon themselves, until at length the surplus waters, through many openings, drained away into the Wash. The Great Ouse itself, which in times past flowed into the Wash at Wisbech, now enters at King's Lynn. But the probability is that all these rivers once flowed into a huge lake which existed on the tract of land that we know to-day as the ' Great Bedford Level,' from thence finding their way, by numerous and frequently shifting channels, into the sea."

From this it would appear that Huntingdon and St. Ives, or at least the sites of those towns, stood overlooking the very edge of that huge inland lake, traces being still left in Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire of these huge meres, Whittlesea and Hogg being two in point ; while the riverside

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below, to Denver and Ely, must have been the very centre of that huge swamp.

On that New Year's Day of which I write there was nothing to show the casual observer that the river Ouse had ever been different to what it then was, although if he knew the ancient history of the place he might have had some suspicion as to what the low-lying tract of land on which I stood had been in the dim and distant past. Embraced, as it were, by the river, which here made a huge semicircular sweep stretching from the railway bridge close to Brampton Mill, right round past Godmanchester, to the very foot of the Castle Hill, was a large tract of meadow land of something like four hundred acres, known as the Portholme, that at first puzzled me much, until I heard the history of the place as given above, when I was convinced that once it had been a mere or swamp, into which the waters of the Ouse discharged themselves before finding their way farther down to the larger meres or swamps that existed below St. Ives; a raised roadway with numerous arches, that carried the traffic from Huntingdon to Godmanchester, lending colour to the idea that this causeway was originally erected as a barrier from the floods—at least, that was my idea. That particular length of the river round the Portholme was a very favourite reach of mine for a bit of spinning, the banks being clear and the water tolerably open, with weed-beds and cover for the fish pretty frequently in evidence. That stretch, together with the one known as the West Meadow, higher up stream, but on the opposite side of the river towards Brampton and Offord, is capital water, finding plenty of work for one short day's spinning. I have had many fine fish from that locality.

But before describing the events of that New Year's Day there are one or two thoughts, reflections, and experiences that must be recorded. In spinning over the slow, deep waters of the Ouse I noticed certain peculiarities in the fish and their methods of feeding which do not exist in faster streams like the Trent. Certain peculiarities of condition

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in water and streams must be noted, and a reason for it guessed at, or as near a guess as circumstances permit. Spinning from the reel in the Nottingham style is, in my opinion, the most scientific and sportsmanlike way of catching pike; more especially in a running river, if that river has any pretence to open water: and even in a sluggish, crawling stream the plan succeeded even beyond my best hopes—quite ninety per cent of the hundreds and hundreds of jack which I have landed at one time or other have been taken on spinning tackle; and when they have run up to nearly nineteen pounds, size cannot be grumbled at, especially when this largest one was taken from a well-fished public river. A rod for spinning need not be too long nor yet too heavy. I once saw a man spinning with a fifteen-foot grilse rod. No doubt that angler thought he could cast further with it than he could with a shorter one, but as far as I could see he defeated his own object; besides, as he owned afterwards, the work was very hard, and awfully telling between the shoulders and across the loins.

Under ordinary conditions a spinning rod need be no longer than from ten and a half to eleven feet; I never had a difficulty in all the varied waters I spun over, the same length of rod suiting the Trent, Thames, and Ouse, as well as the Ivel, the Witham, and even narrower rivers. I prefer a good substantial weapon, one that you can put some weight behind in an emergency; because in spinning, even if you use salmon gut for a trace, the hooks will occasionally catch hold of boughs, roots, and weeds, and a strong haul is necessary to free it. Personally I prefer a good sound East India cane, with a balance handle and a good greenheart top; or lancewood top will do as well. I always did have a sneaking regard for a good lancewood top. The winch fittings, in order to cast comfortably, should be about eight inches or so from the butt end; the rings can be fair-sized snake rings, and a good wide steel loop at the extreme end. If the ferrules on this pike-rod are about eleven-sixteenths on the butt, and seven-sixteenths on the centre, it will be found up to anything nearly, and will not

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weigh much more than two ounces to the foot, if as much; and I am sure it can be used in comfort all through a long day's spinning. It is not killing your fish that is the trouble with a rod, but the difficulties of a cramped position, weeds, boughs, submerged roots, and strong tackle. A pike-reel need not be more than four inches in diameter; if it is much over you will find a difficulty in clasping the back and regulating the speed with the end of the fingers. It should, however, be a Nottingham wood reel, free and easy in its running, and capable of holding one hundred yards of medium undressed line; for a stiff waterproof line, bear in mind, will not be a success in spinning from the reel. If this line will lift a dead weight of sixteen to eighteen pounds it ought to be good enough for any ordinary jack-spinning.

In working over the slow and in some places nearly stagnant waters of the Great Ouse, especially when the water was very bright and abundance of weeds nearly everywhere, it was a matter of real anxiety to me, more than a little at first, to determine the best flight of hooks that would have the best results under every condition of wind, water, and stream. The various spinners that are made were only successful on very special occasions; in a very bright water they showed up glaringly, and where the scattered growth of weeds was showing in more or less abundance just under the surface, and where I found the best pike, these spinners would constantly keep catching fragments of weeds, the rank outside arming of the hooks being responsible in a great measure for this, so that even a very small bit of weed was sufficient to stop the spinning of the bait. What I wanted was a flight that showed very little of the hooks, and would not stop spinning the bait even when bits of weed were trailing from it. I discovered, to meet these requirements, that in the first place the arming of hooks should not be fixed outside, on either side of the bait, but that it should be threaded completely through in such a manner that the bait itself protected the points of the hooks, and yet left it capable of hooking the pike directly he took hold.

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One of the oldest flights I ever saw was used by an old Trent angler named Crosby; it was simply one very large treble on the end of a gimp trace. That simple flight had been in use on the Trent for more than fifty years; later on the Trent spinners modified it somewhat by using two smaller trebles, whipped very nearly together, on the end of the gimp, and threaded completely through the bait from the vent to the mouth. I don't think I ever saw more than two trebles on a pike flight in the hands of the more experienced spinners of that river. When the gimp, or the new Hercules wire gimp of this flight, is threaded through the bait, with the shank of the first treble completely buried in the vent, and only the bends and barbs of the hooks exposed, and one hook of the other or end treble fixed firmly underneath towards the tail, so that when the gimp is pulled tight the bait is bent downwards, or slightly doubled up, I found it would give the bait that natural wobbling sink-and-draw spin that was such a deadly attraction. Afterwards I made those flights in two or three sizes to suit various baits and different states of the water, never using a larger hook than a No. 4, very often only a No. 5 or No. 6.

When I first used that flight down the Ouse I found it a little faulty, a fish now and then being slightly hooked and lost. In the swifter waters of the Trent it was very unusual to lose a fish once hooked on that two-treble flight. The Trent pike seemed to me to take the revolving bait much more quickly in the faster water than did their more sluggish brothers of the Ouse, the tail end of the bait being the part attacked: fish after fish in the Trent was hooked firmly by the end treble. Now I considered this point in all its bearings when operating on the Ouse, and came to the conclusion that the Ouse pike were more lazy and deliberate in their methods, in this the much quieter water assisting them. More than half the fish would meet the bait and take it with a sideways grab, and be only slightly hooked by one of the underneath trebles, a good shake of the head and a huge

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opening of the jaws being sufficient to rid them of the hook. After consideration I made an addition to that flight, in the shape of a small treble whipped to a loop of gimp, something over an inch in length. After baiting the flight in the ordinary way, this loop was dropped over the gimp of the flight and brought down to the nose of the bait, one hook of the treble being stuck in the bait as far down as it would reach towards the shoulder of the bait. This proved a valuable addition to that flight, more than half my pike afterwards being hooked on that side treble; in many cases the other two trebles were hanging below his jaws. (See Chapter XII.)

This spinning flight does not give a brilliant level spin, but, what is a lot more important, it is much more natural; it looks like a wounded and disabled fish trying to escape from some fancied danger. It would, if worked properly, sink and draw, wobble and twist, every now and then making some strange gyrations; and this would attract the attention of a prowling jack sooner than a level brilliantly spun bait. Anyhow, that is how I concluded the matter, and to this device ascribed my success over every other angler in that district.

Another thing that could be noted in connexion with this spinning in the Ouse was the great difference there was in sport when a change in the water took place. The year preceding the New Year's Day that I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter was one of the very best I ever had for pike, over two hundred good fish, besides the small ones returned, being captured during the twenty-five days I was out during that season. Now, why did that season stand out so far above its immediate fellows? I find, on reference, that during very nearly the whole of the time the water was clouded and running more or less strongly; and the best fish and best bags were had when water was a little more clouded and running a little stronger than usual. Somebody once wrote in one of the sporting papers that the water could not be too clear for spinning, especially spinning with a spoon. Now my experience, in waters that

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are as varied as it is possible to find them, is exactly the opposite. I have thrown a bait many thousands of times, and when the water has been very bright and clear I might have thrown my hat at the fish with nearly as much chance of success. Even when a carefully mounted natural bait was used success was by no means certain, unless the water was clouded; and this fact was more to be noted when spinning a spoon.

Once the water had been extremely low and clear for many weeks, and sport next to nothing—did not average one fish in two outings; but all at once we got three days' very heavy rain, and there were signs of a heavy flush coming down the river. Thinking the chance too good to be missed—and I was very nearly too late as it was—I took out my old spoon, and in a mile of river that I had tried time and again unsuccessfully during the bright and low water, I ran no less than eighteen pike, some of them going seven and eight pounds each, and was then driven away, after two hours' work only, by the rapidly rising flood, and had to wade across a low-lying meadow to get home; and the two heaviest fish were the last hooked, when the water had got too thick to see the spoon, even six inches under the surface.

When the water was very clear and bright, when every hook, no matter how it was concealed, was visible to fish and fisherman alike half-way across the river, it was very little good trying during the daytime. I have used all sorts of things, using the brightest of bleak and the smallest of hooks, and gut for a trace; and tried all sorts of dodges; but the results were meagre in the extreme. I have stirred fair-sized fish now and again, and seen them cautiously follow the bait with a suspicious look in their wicked eyes, but have it they would not. Small fish, of a pound or less, would persist in being a nuisance, flying at the bait when the larger and more experienced jack would not have it at any price. Almost the only chance the angler has to pick up a good fish under bright- and low-water conditions is just at dusk; and sometimes when you stir a good fish,

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and he gets suspicious, if after a time you change the bait to something exactly opposite in shape and colour, he may have it at the first throw.

I remember one of the places that I spun over on that New Year's Day was at another time the scene of a contradiction pure and simple. All the afternoon I had toiled and spun, but the bag remained empty. I thought it an ideal day for late October. The breeze rippled up the water, the sun shone nicely, and there was a tint in the river that I thought was promising; but not even a baby jack moved. A little after four o'clock the wind suddenly died down, and the rain that had been threatening for some time came down in earnest—just the sort of weather that I should say was anything but favourable for pike-spinning. However, I went back to the eddy behind the island at the tail of Brampton Mill, on the West Meadow side, a spot I may say that twice before during the afternoon I had well spun over, and this time, within the next hour, I got five fish going 26 lb. (largest 6¼ lb., smallest over 4 lb.), and finally was smashed up by the biggest pike I ever hooked on spinning tackle, by trying to stop him from running into a mass of flags.

But that New Year's Day of gloom and slush was not a pike day by any of the rules and traditions governing the subject; there was no sun, and the wind was not strong enough to ruffle the surface of the water; while a fine, drizzling rain added considerably to the discomforts of the situation. For bait I had nothing but three or four small roach, and they were not of tip-top quality. Commencing operations at the place locally known as Pike Bay—a point some distance below the iron railway bridge, and where the river widens out into a reed-fringed pool—I tried the water most carefully right down to a clump of trees called Beatley's Grove, without so much as a response of any kind. The water hereabouts was preserved by the Huntingdon Angling Association, which made some small charge to strangers who fished the place, although the local anglers

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could fish it for miles on payment of a very small annual sum. Continuing my progress farther down stream, I spun over every few yards of the water to the locks, and then turned down the lock pool and stream to a small island heavily clothed with trees, and known as Baumgartner's Island; but luck was clean out, and not a fish to show for all my efforts up to then, and in those days it was a capital water for the persevering spinner.

The short afternoon was waning to a close, and darkness would soon settle down, when I mounted my two remaining baits on the two sets of flights, so as to have a spare one in readiness. I cast one of them into the junction of the two waters that just here met and mingled under the very shadow of those giant trees; a huge tug and a mighty splash indicated that the day after all, with luck, would not be a blank. That fish, on the fine tackle I used, fought hard for her liberty, more than once leaping clean from the water; but the balance was in my favour, and the landing-net I usually carried finished the tragedy. The very next cast, in exactly the same place, proved to be the death of her pikeship's mate, a lovely male fish two pounds lighter than the female. This was one of the handsomest male fish I ever saw, even if somewhat small. Side by side the two looked a picture, for if they were lovely in their lives, in death they were not divided. A tinge of sadness creeps over the glowing feeling of triumph even at such a satisfactory ending of an afternoon's outing. For was it not a rude and sudden ending to their honeymoon, even at the very commencement? Were they not a newly married pair? And their dreams of bliss—if they did dream—were shattered at one stroke by the ruthless hand of a fell destroyer.

But it was no good moralizing. Where pike are, there will the sportsmen be gathered together, and Mr. and Mrs. Pike themselves would not have minded ending at one fell swoop a family party of roach or a honeymoon couple of dace; so if they fell into the trap themselves that they had set for others, it was only restoring slightly the balance of nature.

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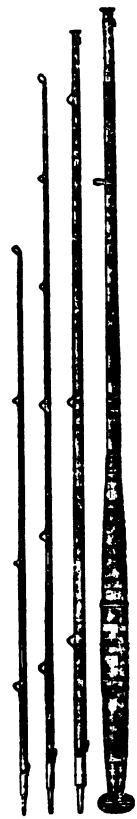
The weighing-in ticket of the club for that New Year's brace of jack read: "January 1st, 1890. 2 Pike 12 lb. 4 ozs. largest 7 lb. 4 ozs." The larger of the two fish was only twenty-six inches long, full length from end to end; while the five-pounder male was only a very little less—a nice brace; by no means large—in fact, scarcely moderate; but the memory of them and their capture looms larger by far than others I have taken much exceeding them in weight.

The largest jack I ever took on the Great Ouse, on spinning tackle, weighed within an ounce of ten pounds; and this fell a victim to a fresh sprat, and was captured in that stretch of the river that flows past Paxton Hill, just at the corner where a backwater comes in: a long row of poplar trees stands on the opposite side. Once, as I said a page or two back, I hooked a tremendous pike on spinning tackle in the run of water below Brampton Mill. The situation was dangerous; large beds of flags were on either hand; it was a case for a tug-of-war. I tried to stop him, but the overstrained line was not up to our united strengths, so it parted just above the trace with a crack like a whip lash, and my record pike had gone. I have never had a chance like that since. It is only once in a lifetime that such comes one's way. I underestimated his strength. When I gave him the full power of the rod, to stop his career into a mass of flags, he rolled up to the surface, and too late I discovered the prize that slipped from my grasp. But I don't think I could have got him if I had let him run, as he was making for a most critical place; so I don't blame myself much under the circumstances.



THE "IDEAL" PIKE ROD
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CHAPTER IX

DAYS AMONG THE BARBEL

(ON THE TRENT, THAMES, AND KENNETT)

Barbel and barbel rivers—Good bags—Where barbel abound—Ground-baits and hook-baits—The peculiar biting of barbel—The outfit—Virgin swims—Good sport.

"*BARBUS VULGARIS*" are kittle cattle; you never know when you have them, nor yet when you are likely to get them. Sometimes, when you think everything is favourable, and you are bound to get a bag, the result is the blankest of all blanks. And, on the other hand, you may meet with unexpected luck when that luck was never once anticipated. I thought bream-fishing was bad enough, and the most uncertain of any I ever went in for; but anyhow, barbel will run them a very good second, even if they don't breast the tape first. I sometimes catch myself wondering whether the game is worth the candle, and how many tens of thousands of worms and stones of boiled scratchings have been dribbled down the barbel swims of various rivers, and whether a corresponding weight of barbel rewarded our best efforts. Taking them all round, I don't suppose the very best of our barbel fishermen would have to rack their brains very long to remember the really good takes of barbel they have had during their fishing career. But it does not matter: bags or blanks, they go again; more worms are sacrificed to the shrine of "St. Barbus," and "Better luck next time!" is, perhaps, all they say, when the bag can be lifted up in one hand and dropped into the creel. The angler who once gets a good take of barbel will go again and again, even if that one

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great take is the only big one he ever gets in his career; once bitten with that fever, he is never cured.

There used to be an old tackle-dealer who lived in Cartergate, Newark-on-Trent: Owen was his name. It is more than thirty years since I made his acquaintance, and then he was too old and feeble to go out fishing; but his enthusiasm was not dimmed by time, and he loved to fight his battles over again. He showed me the barbel tackle he used thirty years before then, tackle that is never seen nowadays, and scarcely dreamed about; bottoms of double-twisted copper wire, a rod of solid timber, weighing as much as three or more pounds; a line of hempen cord, and a leger lead that would brain the first barbel it dropped on. "Ah!" said that old man, "I nearly had it all my own way those days; never hardly saw a barbel fisherman at work. But look here," he added, as he turned back the page of a well-thumbed and ancient notebook, "that was the only big catch of barbel I ever had in my life; six, and eight, and even ten fish at a sitting I don't count as a big catch."

That old notebook said thirty-two barbel had been slain that day; they weighed two hundredweight, largest nearly fifteen pounds, and the very smallest of all a little over three pounds, an average of nearly seven pounds per fish. I never heard before or since of such an average for barbel, and I never doubted the old man's word or his carefully preserved notebook, which added the information that the fish were caught in the park at East Stoke, on the Trent.

I believe a preserved Trent barbel is in existence that weighed fourteen pounds, taken by Mr. S. Hibbert in the Staythorp waters of that river. Joe Corah and I got one about two o'clock one September morning, from the weir-hole of the bottom locks at Newark, that went nearly thirteen pounds. I fancy the Thames has larger barbel in its waters than the Trent; I have seen twelve- and thirteen-pounders preserved more than once or twice. And look at Jimmy Dawson's case of five preserved barbel, that is now in the room of the London Piscatorial Society. That case is a dream. I fancy those fish were considerably more than

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fifty pounds collectively; Pangbourne was the scene of that triumph. There are tremendous barbel in the weir pools of the middle and lower Kennet—barbel that smash up any tackle that is presented to them; it is dangerous ground for the fishermen to work on, and those barbel know it. Some odd times, when they are lured outside, captures of individual fish up to ten and eleven pounds are made; but the big ones prefer to stay at home.

The very big bags of barbel that I can remember during the whole of my fishing experiences are very few in number: there was Wheeldon's catch of a hundred fish from near Windsor Bridge, on the Thames; there was Robert Wells' one-day catch of a hundred and twenty-three from the Trent; and David Slater's catch of ninety-seven in one day, and three hundred in eight days, will be a record for the same river, I make no doubt, for many a day to come.

Once or twice I have been in at the death of a good many barbel during the day, but the most I ever got to my own rod was thirty-three, and they ran small. It was in a private stretch of the Berkshire Kennet, about sixty yards below a weir, just at a bend where two streams met and eddied together; and a mighty tree, whose very roots were washed by the strong current, overshadowed the whole swim. That bag was unexpected; no previous baiting had been done, and it was only the merest chance that caused me to select that spot. I took down a thousand lobs, and found seven feet of water and what appeared to be a lovely bottom just between the two streams. There was a mighty current running, so much so that I had to use two Thames leger bullets to hold the bottom. Clipping up in very small pieces a couple of hundred lobs, I found that by dropping them close to my feet they would speedily work into the right spot; and as the water suddenly shoaled to no more than two feet in depth at the tail end of the hole I knew they could not get far away. Threading a maiden lob whole on a No. 4 Carlisle hook, I dropped it in the run; I never had more than six yards to cast my bait, so it was easy work. That worm had hardly reached

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"ON WALTON'S HISTORIC LEA"

YE OLDE RYE HOUSE, HERTFORDSHIRE

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the bottom before it was taken with a jerk that nearly pulled the rod from my hand, and the next moment out sprang a barbel six inches above the surface. It was one of the easiest day's fishing I ever had; there was no trouble, it was one of those occasions when the fish mean business. None of those fish weighed more than three pounds, and none of them were less than two and a half. I don't know which gave me the greater pleasure, feeling their strong fighting in the heavy stream, or seeing them glide away into the deep water of the weir as I returned them fifty yards above.

The late Tommy Sunman, George Wakeland, and myself, once had a rare slice of luck down the Trent. There had been a sudden and heavy flood during the closing days of June, and a low-lying meadow, covered with small hay-cocks, was flooded to the depth of six or eight inches. That flood receded as rapidly as it had risen, and chancing to lift up one of those hay-cocks, I found underneath it a full pint of very large half-drowned lobworms. We searched more of those heaps, and collected several thousands of those worms, which we kept in moss for several days. When the water had gone down to its normal level we carefully put those worms in the barbel swim of the Corporation fishery, Winthorp, and had rare sport for three or four days, getting eight or ten fish each on the average per day, that went well over three pounds per fish. Another time Tom Bentley and myself got fifteen good fish from the East Stoke stretch of the same river. The rapids below Averham weir was a favourite place, but scratchings as bait, and a rather heavy leger as tackle, was the most successful method to adopt there.

Barbel fishing nowadays among the Trent adepts seems to be done by several different plans, and the Trent, as a general rule, fishes the best when it is dead low. A baiting of well-boiled greaves or scratchings, mixed with boiled potatoes, bran, and middlings, is adopted by some experts, who use on the hook a bunch of big gentles or a lump of white greaves, and fish with a big pelican quill float

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of just sufficient size to allow the bait to trip along the bottom. Some experts swear by the leger and greaves; others, again, use worms on float tackle, ground-baiting little and often all the while they are fishing; while others believe in ground-baiting a day or two beforehand, and working a light leger from end to end of the swim.

The most successful places on the Trent for barbel that I found when fishing that river were the stream beyond the railway bridge, just behind the bottom lock-house at Newark, and the deeper water among the wooden piles of that structure; there was a lot more water in those places then—a bunch of cadbaits during the earlier part of the season being the most successful bait just there. The white foot-bridge, not far from the ruins of the old castle, was another favoured spot; the stream below Averham Weir, another famous spot was about half-way between Kelham bridge and the old wooden bridge on the Muskham road. The Corporation swim at Winthorp used to be very good, and so was all that reach opposite Carlton Church; and, lower down, the field before you got to the osier holt was particularly good. I have had fair bags from all these swims, using float tackle and worm, and scratchings and leger, varied at times with a bunch of gentles; but I have referred to the lower waters in Chapter VI.

There are many good barbel swims all down the Thames, perhaps one of the very best being the deep run behind Old Windsor Weir. The heavy stream round Penton Hook is also very good; while any of the weir streams can be tried with some chance of success. But in selecting a barbel swim care should be taken that the stream is fairly heavy and the bottom gravelly. There is a capital half-mile or more of good fast water between "Bell Weir" and Staines, from which I have had one or two pretty decent catches; but still, finding a barbel swim on the Thames is an easier matter than it is on the Trent. The Thames seems to adapt itself to barbel and their habits; but somehow or other, I never could meet with much success when

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trying the Trent man's plan, lobworms and leger being, on the whole, more successful than scratchings and gentles. Sometimes, when you are not prepared, a barbel appropriates the gentles intended for a roach; and sometimes causes a commotion by annexing a nubble of cheese-paste that you think a chub ought to have taken. You never know what you may have a tussle with in the Thames, and barbel is one of the most likely fish to meet by accident, especially if you happen to be using a rod that is not up to a prolonged fight with a lusty five-pounder.

Barbel, with their peculiar-shaped mouths, always appear to me likely to have a difficulty in taking a bait that is presented to them by the angler in an ordinary way. I fancy that they would have to roll over on their backs, with the mouth uppermost, to stand much chance. I don't think I ever saw them feeding; but an old friend assured me that he once had the great good fortune to see a shoal feeding on the bottom in a stream about four feet deep. He was quietly sitting in his punt, waiting for a friend, when in the clear water he saw a dozen barbel on the bottom swimming against the stream. There was a deep swim twenty yards below that was frequently baited, and he supposed some of the pieces of worms had settled there on the shallows. He could not see exactly what they were feeding on, but they turned sideways so much that a lot of their white bellies was exposed, and they appeared to suck the bait in sideways. He had a good view for more than a couple of minutes, when, without any warning, they vanished towards the deeper water.

Now this feeding of the barbel seems to me to explain one or two things. Sometimes, when legering, we feel a quiet sucking tension, and then a steady pull on the line, and on striking find we have securely hooked our fish. In all probability that barbel rolled on his side and sucked in the bait, the hook catching hold of the front or side of his jaws. Sometimes the bite we get is sudden and startling—a sudden bang, as if he had swallowed the whole leger at once, and on striking we feel just a small resistance, and no

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more. Now that barbel in all likelihood had his nose straight down, and jabbed sharp down on top of the worm; the stroke was made before he got it fairly in his mouth, and the hook caught just the corner and tore away at the first pull. When I come to look at this point in the light of past experiences, I fancy there is more in this than we think, and that the angler is not too much to blame sometimes for missing his fish.

I mentioned a page or two back that I could never get on in the Thames by adopting the Trent man's style, the only solitary instance of success occurring one September day in a small back stream that left the main river over a tumbling bay, between Walton and Sunbury. Some distance down this backwater—or, rather, it was a rattling side-stream—there was an abrupt corner into which the stream shot with some force, and then set away again towards the opposite bank, forming an eddy which ran slowly back up stream. It was a pretty long cast—a roach pole and tight line was no good; a leger was very little better, as the strong stream between the angler and the eddy would suck the leger back again very quickly. It was a case for a very light Nottingham style; the cast would have to be long and clean, and the line kept above the rapid current in between. That eddy over on the other side looked so tempting; I found five feet of water over there, and after tossing a few balls of bread and bran ground-bait in I rigged up a pelican quill float that carried eight or ten large shots. This weight I could easily get out. I had no idea what was in the swim—roach, dace, or chub probably; so to be on the safe side I put on a No. 8 Crystal, mounted on 2x gut. I had a lot of trouble with that swim, owing to the fierce stream in front catching the line and sweeping the bait far down. But I stuck to it with a bunch of gentles all day long, and successfully landed fifteen barbel; but they ran small, from 1½ lb. to 3½ lb. Only four of them were worth keeping; the rest were returned. I was well pleased with that day's sport, the conditions and results being up to those of the old days in the Trent; and the

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old Trent method of using float tackle and gentles was that which I adopted.

I was down at Sunbury Weir one day, and saw a man just about to ground-bait the weir-hole; he had originally a thousand lobworms every other day to do it with, but these had been clipped up into small pieces and mixed with clay. I counted fifty balls as big as large cocoanuts, so that panned out to about twenty worms to every ball. He said he was going to give them three doses like that, one every other day, and the next week his patron was coming down for three days; but there was a heap more clay than worms about that ground-bait.

Another man, fishing Penton Hook from a punt, was using an old earthenware flower-pot as an aid in getting his worms quickly to the bottom. He clipped them up and mixed a little clay with them, then wedging tightly a cake of clay, like a pie-crust, on the top, let it down by a cord fastened to the hole in the bottom. The old pot being inverted mouth downwards, the worms and clay slipped out on reaching the bottom, the tapering side of the vessel being an aid to this. We found an arrangement like that one of the most useful things we could have in ground-baiting the deep and heavy swims of the Trent from a boat, as when bait is thrown in loose it very often gets far out of reach. One of the most important points to observe in barbel fishing is a proper use of ground-bait. See that it is put in the proper place, just where your float tackle or leger is likely to run. The question of the biting of barbel is more important than some fishermen think. I know, as an experienced man, and so does every other barbel angler, that you feel the pluck—it may be given ever so gingerly—and sometimes you just hook the fish for a moment, and sometimes miss them altogether. I said on a previous page that the peculiar formation of the mouth had a lot to do with this. All sorts of advice has been given to anglers by the lookers-on. It has been said that the looker-on sees more of the game than the man who is engaged in it. You should have done so-and-so says the

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looker-on. That is all very well; but the man who is legering, and has the fine line between his finger and thumb, is more likely to feel the bite than the man who stands on the bank finding fault.

When you are legering a heavy stream, and the line is taut from bait to reel, the finger-tips that hold the line are sensitive to a remarkable degree, and the smallest nip at the worm is communicated to you at once. One cannot lay down a hard and fast line in striking at a barbel bite, especially with a leger. I have struck at the first pluck, and missed them; have waited till the second, and then missed them; and I have had them firmly hooked at the very first pull. In legering where the water is deep and the bottom unlevel there may be more reasons than one for this missing of the fish—the peculiar position of the mouth and the direction of the bait when he grabs or sucks it in.

In long casting or float-fishing down shallower, quieter streams I found the misses much less frequent than in legering, the hook usually being firmly fixed in the top jaw at the first pull; whereas in legering I remember four fish that I got one day at Staines, and every one was hooked in the corner of the bottom jaw; and those four were all I landed out of the eight that I touched. Sometimes you get a better average than that; but when a man tells me that he *never* loses a barbel when legering, why, I hardly believe him.

On one day we may firmly hook and land every fish we strike, no matter how big they are; while on another day we may get as many bites and runs, yet fail to land a single one, although using tackle exactly similar on both occasions. We are broken up every time we get a bite; and then we blame the hooks, or the gut line, or some other innocent thing, animate or inanimate, as the cause. After carefully considering this perplexing problem for years, and watching closely some of the best barbel fishermen it was ever my luck to fish with, as well as taking stock of myself, I am forced to the conclusion that it is largely a question

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of the temperament and mood of the angler. Our nerves are highly strung. On some days nothing goes wrong; on other days things are just the reverse, and nothing goes right. Do as we will, we cannot make things run smoothly, although there are no visible signs that any difference exists. This matter of the angler's nerves is more to be noted in barbel fishing than in any other branch of the art. I firmly believe this is the cause that at various times has led to my own and my friends' utter and abject failure when barbelling. I don't think I ever heard this suggestion offered by any other angler; but it has long been on my mind to make it, even at the risk of getting laughed at.

Barbel rods should always be well set up in their joints. I like a good tough East India cane rod in three lengths, with a couple of good greenheart tops, of good substance and power, one top some six inches shorter and more powerful than the other. A balance handle and some fair-sized strong and stiff safety rings are of the utmost importance and necessity on a barbel rod. It need not be much more than eleven feet in length, and it should have a good give-and-take play in it: rather on the stiff side when not in use, but rigid and springy when in conflict with a good fish. A three and a half inch centre-pin check reel, and fifty yards of white plaited silk line, that will lift a dead weight of ten or twelve pounds, are quite good enough; while if the tackle and the hooks are dressed on and made from good "Padron" gut, stained brown, they will be up to anything required. Nothing beats the old-fashioned long-shank Carlisle hooks for barbel, especially for worms; while No. 10 trebles might be a little better for greaves; Nos. 3, 4, 5 are good sizes for lobs. A barbel outfit need not be so very elaborate —more importance must be attached to a proper selection of a swim, and a proper application of the ground-bait.

My old friend W. Bailey used to say to me sometimes: "Now, look here, you keep your eyes open, and if you see the barbel pitching during the early part of July, in a place that nobody ever thought of fishing in before, let me know; we shall get some better fish there." That noted Trent

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angler was very fond of pitching on a virgin swim, and I know it paid well more than once. There was one spot down the Lower Trent where the water was twelve feet deep, and suddenly shoaled up to seven feet, forming a sort of hollow bank or shelf right across the channel of the river. That was an easy place to get our ground-bait worms in; the bulk would lodge under that old ledge. We often wondered what that old ledge was; sometimes we thought it must have been some old timber silted completely up. It was a terror of a place to fish; you never knew when to catch it at a right height. If we found it right so that we could run the long-corking float right under the ledge, and it would stop there ten minutes, we were bound to get a good barbel; but more often than not it completely baffled us, so curious was the swim.

I have gone before daybreak in the morning to clip up worms for the barbel swim. I have gone at sunset and put many thousands in; have baited the runs and weir pools and streams with a bag of boiled-up greaves; have legered, long-corked, and floated with worms, cadbaits, greaves, and gentles; and now I say again, the game was hardly worth the candle. But who has felt the boring tugs of one of those game fish, as he has fought it out to the bitter end; and when he has been landed, within ten minutes has had the same experience again with another fish: now and again, after a ten minutes' fight that will live in his memory, getting one that he is tempted to put in a glass case; has felt the weakened tackle give way at a knot, and the fish of the day has gone—who has experienced these things and not succumbed to the charms of barbel fishing? These experiences only come sometimes; the blanks are more numerous than the prizes. But still you keep going until another day; probably a couple of seasons later you are down the Trent, or up the Kennet, or at Old Windsor Weir, or round Penton Hook; and at night, when you look at the dozen splendid barbel that have fallen during the day to your own rod, you wonder how anybody can say fishing

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is an ignoble sport. That bag compensates for all, and you are ready to say the same as I say, who have had the experience, that barbel fishing, when fish are on, is a sport of the very highest class.

It was a six-pound barbel that once, a good many years ago, nearly betrayed me. My old friend Frank Sims was a believer in night fishing when water was bright and low, legering with a good lump of white greaves. We went one night to a deep hole not far from Kelham Bridge, on the Trent; I got a six-pounder that fought and splashed in the darkness like a fury. The water had hardly settled after all this commotion when we heard the tramp of the keeper along the gravel. We had no business there at night. Fortunately we were under an overhanging bank, and the keeper had to make a detour above us. Just at that moment my big barbel gave a hoarse, sucking croak, enough to attract attention at such a short distance. The keeper stopped, and appeared to listen for a minute, but hearing nothing further went on. It was a narrow escape. We got five barbel and a big chub that evening; the chub was the smallest, and it was an ounce or two over four pounds.

Between Carlton Mill and the osier holt, down the Lower Trent, there was one of the most lovely barbel eddies it was ever my good fortune to fish. Old Trent men will know the very spot; it was in the last meadow before you reached the osiers, and a lot of rough stones edged the river's brink just there. The depth in those days varied from six to ten feet; and a long, oily eddy curled away right under the very shadow of those old willows. A gentleman from Sheffield was down, and he particularly wanted his first essay among the barbel to be successful; so to ensure that end sent me down a couple of thousand lobworms, which I duly sliced up and scattered down that swim. The weather, my notebook says, was on the bright side; water also very bright, a condition of things which did not favour a baiting of lobworms; nor did it favour a beginner in this particular branch of sport, as fine tackle would have to be employed.

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We used large quills, that carried ten or a dozen swan shot, and a corking lead, and found we could both swim the stream and long-cork the eddy with them.

In spite of another thousand lobworms that I clipped up and put in during the day, hour after hour went by, and not a barbel rewarded us. 'Tis true half a dozen chub, several dace, and a score of very fine eels and flounders reposed in the bag, and made a goodly show; but the fish we were after came not. But everything, they say, comes to him who waits, and happening during the late afternoon to go into the osier holt I found a heap of old flood rack, that had been washed by a flood into a corner. Under this old heap there were at least fifty of the reddest and liveliest leen worms that ever I saw, some of them more than three inches long. As a forlorn hope we tried them, and within the next two hours we landed eleven fish, largest 6¾ lb., smallest 2¾ lb. I got the big one, and I seem to feel him now as he rushed up stream into the very strongest current, and bored, and tugged, and fought on the fine tackle for at least twenty minutes. Ten times I got that float above the water, and nine times he dragged it down again, and dragged and dragged until I thought I should never see it again; but at last I was able to keep the float above the surface, and when this is accomplished the fiercest battle will speedily end.

That catch below Carlton Mill is one of the most cherished recollections of my career; there were only eleven barbel to the two rods, but not one fish was lost and not one broke away from the tackle, the most unusual thing that ever happened to me. I don't think I ever had another catch of barbel in my life where at least one-third of my fish did not come unhooked, after a plunge or two, and escape.

My friend went home with a light heart and a heavy basket, a convert to the doctrine I mentioned a page or two back, that barbel fishing, when the fish are on, is a sport of the highest order. But these days are few and far between, even if you make it your special sport, and use tens of thousands of lobworms during a single season.

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Once, in the boiling water of a Trent weir-hole, I fairly and squarely snared a six-pound barbel; the hook never touched the fish at all. I really thought for half an hour that I had hooked the very Jabberwock himself; I could not get on terms with him at all. He hung to the bottom like grim death; his tugging and boring were terrific; getting his head up was utterly out of the question. I was anxious, and played him carefully, as I could see in my mind's eye a record fish of some sort. An hour went by, then two hours, and the contest appeared to have only just commenced, as far as that fish was concerned; but all at once I began to recover line, and the huge boring tugs got weaker; finally, after a few more minutes, the landing net was slipped under it, and then the secret of the prolonged battle was revealed. By some means or other the tackle had wound itself round the root of the tail, and the hook hitched over the gut, forming a loop that fairly snared that fish. I was disappointed, as I expected something bigger than six pounds; but a six-pound barbel under those conditions can put every ounce of his weight into the contest, as his head is free.

In one of my other books I just mention that this was the most stubborn fight I ever had with a fresh-water fish; but I never before gave the details of the conflict.

I cannot close this chapter without referring to those old Trent barbel fishermen with whom I have spent many a day, and whom I have assisted to land many a barbel—Thomas Bentley, George Wakeland, Thomas Sunman, Andrew Broughton, and Frank Sims: good men and true, barbel fishermen of the first rank, now sleeping the last long sleep, every one of them. Sunday after Sunday, and sometimes once or twice during the week, we roamed those Lower Trent waters, and many a bag of mixed fish did George Wakeland carry back with him to Nottingham, the spoils of our rods. Many a hint did I find valuable, coming from their lips, and many an object lesson did I learn from their illustrations. Twenty years have passed since some of them died; but in my memory they still live.

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CHAPTER X

WITH THE CHUB, AND A FLY ROD

The haunts of big chub—Dangerous situations—The Ouse as a chub river—The Trent and its chub—The fly-fishing outfit—List of chub flies and their dressings—Fishing the stream—Night fishing for chub.

I MAY as well confess at the outset that I never was an expert in the use of the fly-rod, bottom fishing claiming the lion's share of my attentions; but still, my friends were good enough to say that I was a decent performer. Anyhow, I could amuse myself very well, cast my fly lightly over a rising trout, hit a dace almost before he rose, and give the chub down the streams and backwaters something to contemplate; so I must not grumble even if my fly-fishing essays have not been so very numerous. It is perhaps significant, however, that half a dozen taken on the fly were the biggest average chub I ever got at one outing.

It was in a streamy backwater of the Great Ouse, a stream full of weeds and flags, difficult to fish, and difficult to land your fish when once hooked. That adventure is marked in my calendar with a very big red cross; those six chub weighed 25 lb. 10 oz.: every one was over four pounds. I never had six chub in one day that anywhere approached them, either by bottom fishing or fly—the two nearest lots being four chub on the fly going 17 lb. 6 oz., also from the Great Ouse; every one of these likewise went over the four pounds: and five that I got on gentles in the last hour of a day I had down the Berkshire Kennet; those five went 16 lb. 8 oz., only one of which exceeded four pounds.

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It was a lovely day in August when I got that bag of six. I had been rudd fishing near the poplar-trees that stand just above the railway bridge which carries the Midland line across the Great Ouse. Towards evening I went to a back-water that leaves the main river at Brampton Wale, and after a run of about a mile re-enters the river at Beatley's Grove. This small stream, known as Lee's Brook, was a famous place for big chub. I could see them in many places—under the overhanging boughs, between the flag beds, and in little clear spaces within six inches of the bank; and some of them were the very giants of their class. There was one shoal of five fish that sometimes used to bask in the sunshine, on the surface of a pool, between the two railway bridges; those five chub must have averaged six pounds apiece. They used to swim round and round that pool, and make themselves generally aggravating; and how to catch any of them was a problem: the position was so open and exposed that one wave of the arm was enough to send them to the bottom; and lobworms, gentles, cad-baits, wasp-grubs, pith and brains, and scratchings: on long cork, float, and leger;—never got one of the big ones.

I saw a shoal of chub that afternoon under a willow that dipped into the water; there did not appear to be more than a foot of water just there, and it was very, very clear. For eight or ten feet between me and that willow there was a perfect jungle of weeds, and a fringe of flags all along the edge, that made a capital blind and concealed all my movements. When I fished those waters I carried a landing-net, with a shaft of East India cane eight feet long; the folding ring was eighteen inches in diameter, and the net a yard deep. Before commencing operations on those chub I quietly laid the net on the weeds as far as ever it would reach—as a matter of fact it was within six inches of the far edge of them—and crouching behind those flags I commenced one of the longest casting trials I ever engaged in. That fly went alongside those boughs scores of times, and not one bit of notice did those chub take. Nearly an hour went by, and the sun was getting low, when a slight breeze

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sprang up and shook some beetles or caterpillars from the boughs overhead; those chub were instantly on the alert, and came out of their shelter into the open water in front. I got the whole six within the next quarter of an hour; the moment one took the fly I jumped him into the waiting net before he had time to turn his head downwards, and lifted him out without a splash. I got the sixth fish before they realized what was the matter, so rapidly was it done; but the seventh was a little nearer the boughs, and on feeling the steel he sprang among them, hung for an instant, and then vanished with a mighty swirl; and the rest of the shoal departed with him, for I saw them no more that evening.

It was not much good fly-fishing these runs and backwaters unless you could see the fish, and then your chance was not good unless you had plenty of cover to crouch behind. The successful fly on that occasion was a Zulu dressed on a No. 8 eyed hook, and the hook garnished with eight or ten big gentles. I never could get those big chub unless there were plenty of gentles on the hook, and the bigger the bunch the greater the success. It smacks terribly of poaching; but there it was—no gentles, no big chub. The cast I used for that fishing was Allcock's Hercules Lake cast, a cast that would lift a dead weight of six pounds, and at odd times they would smash that like a thread. It was not a bit of good playing a fish there; if he once got his head down it was all over—fish lost among the vegetation, swim disturbed, all the rest gone to cover; it was a case of tumbling them into the landing-net the very second you hooked them; and the more dangerous the place the better the chub that lived in it.

The very nearest I ever got to a wild chub in its native haunts was in the same backwater, but nearer the overflow, where it came in from the main river. Just there the vegetation was more dense than ever, and a leafy archway, that spanned a foot of clear running water right under the bank, attracted my attention. Cautiously crawling on my stomach, I peeped through this reedy arch, and my nose

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nearly touched the water. Within six inches of my eyes there swayed one of the most magnificent chub I ever saw. I could count every ray on his slowly wagging fins, I could count every scale along his lateral line, I could see every detail of his vast bulk; his head was up stream and he never moved. The little pool he was in was only three feet long, less than two feet wide, and only a foot deep. He was two feet long himself, and must have gone more than seven pounds. He was the sole occupant of that tiny pool, and a monarch. I did not see a fresh-water shrimp, a tiny shell-fish, or even a minnow, in that pool. I expect he had a retreat if his front or rear was threatened; but there was no chance of getting either bait or fly anywhere near that tiny pool. There were several of those streamy backwaters in the neighbourhood of Huntingdon and Godmanchester. One came in behind the race-stand. It was here that the four four-pounders were got; and all the way down to the Four Gate Pit, near Houghton, were back streams inhabited by chub. A private stream in Hinchingbrook Park gave me a few good chub at one time and another; all these waters were made for the fly specially.

I remember a friend calling my attention once to a brace of chub that lived under a willow at the foot of the weir near Houghton Mill, on the Great Ouse. They were a pair of fish that were calculated to straighten out the kinks of a gut line, and equal to anything I had ever seen. My friend said those two chub were his, and they would look well in one case in his front room. I agreed with this; but whether the chub would fall in with this arrangement was another matter. He put on a big fly and garnished the hook with a lively bunch of gentles. A good throw from behind a stunted bush that grew at the end of the old wall landed that fly all right, and it sailed down stream in exactly the correct spot. One could hear almost the smack of Mr. Chub's jaws as they closed on that fly, and —a head shot out of the water, there was a fierce rush, and half my friend's gut cast came back. He went back to his roach fishing, ruminating sadly. At tea-time he had

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another look under that old bush; there was one chub there in the selfsame spot—the other had gone into retirement, to nurse his wrath, I suppose. Undeterred by the previous disaster, my friend had another cast, and precisely the same thing happened; only this time a broad-fluked tail waved for one instant on the surface, and another cast had gone. My friend assured me that he had not those two chub on, counting the time for the pair, more than three-fifths of a second.

Chubber Childs, a man who used to fish that locality a good deal, has told me more than once that the gut was never drawn from silkworms that could stop some of the old chub who lived among the boughs and roots of some old sunken trees. I remember an old ash tree that had sunk in the junction of two streams below the Four Gate Pit at Houghton. Among its branches was a shoal of chub; and they stayed there, for all that we were able to do; and the most curious and aggravating part of the business was that the best chub were in the worst places. It was not a bit of good, down all those Ouse backwaters, casting for chub with the fly unless you could see them. That stream below St. Neots Paper Mill was a good spot for chub when I fished there; and lower down, at Offord Weir pools, there were some tremendous chub. One taken from there on a snap tackle with a big gudgeon as bait, went a long way on to eight pounds. All down this river, from Wolverton to Earith Bridge—particularly down all the streamy backwaters, and in the weir pools and streams flowing from them—good chub are to be found. At Tempsford, where the Ivel comes in, downwards from the stanch, good chub can be taken on the fly. I should say there is nearly a mile of good fly-fishing water there; and very nearly the same can be said of Barford, some distance below Bedford.

I can remember the Lower Trent when it was a sure find to the chub fly-fisherman. Once in particular, many years ago, I saw a man catch no less than thirty-two chub on the fly in less than a mile of water. The shallows and

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"SOME HUGE BARBEL HUG THOSE DEEPS"

WHITCHURCH WEIR, PANGBOURNE, ON THE THAMES

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streams from Averham Weir down to Kelham used to be a good ground for the chub fly-fisherman, and many of these streams and places could be reached from the bank. On the Thames there are miles of good fly-fishing water; but it needs a boat to successfully operate on some of the boughs and best swims.

Wales is a paradise for the chub man; some of the rivers in the Principality literally swarm with chub, and they will persist in taking the fly or minnow of the trout angler; so there they are voted a nuisance.

Before the Mundella Act was passed I used to attend an angler who had the right of fishing that beautiful stretch of the Trent from Averham Weir down to Kelham Bridge. In those days the chub used to congregate on those shallows for scouring purposes during the early days of June, remaining there for from ten to fifteen days. He used a long double-handed rod and usually two flies, as the water was very open, with no obstructions worth the name. I have seen him with two chub on at a time, weighing as much as seven pounds between them; and a pretty commotion they used to make. During those days of June I have known him to land at least fifty pounds of an evening; but they were very dirty, and the milk would be running from them; they used to give good sport, and that was what he wanted, never keeping a single fish.

One of my earliest recollections of chub fly-fishing in that river was seeing an ancient individual whipping the lower water. Instead of having buttons on his garments he employed very large hooks and eyes as fasteners, and was rather a character in his way. I don't know what trade he followed, but his ancient suit was glazed from top to toe with size or grease. He made his own flies, and managed to get sport in a general way. I saw him get ten good chub one day, using a nondescript fly of brilliant colour and a very rough-and-ready pattern.

Fly-fishing for chub during the evenings of a very hot summer is a sport that can be enjoyed by any angler. I saw two at work one evening on the Thames within a

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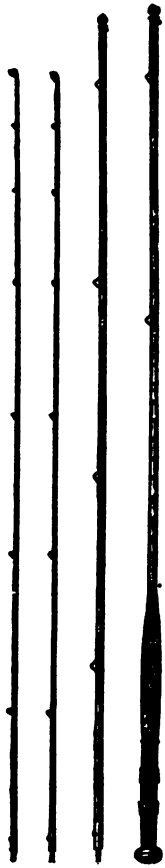
quarter-mile of each other; one was a boy not more than fourteen years old, the other was a veteran of nearly eighty; and I was puzzled to know which of the two was putting the most zest into his work or enjoying it the more.



CHUB FLY ROD OF HIGHEST CLASS IN GREENHEART

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The shallow river at Deeping St. James, in Lincolnshire, is a capital stretch for the fly-fisherman. Chub run small, however, but give good sport. In the neighbourhood of Weybridge, on the Thames, the shallows very often yield good sport to the fly; and the Ivel below Biggleswade, where the river is weedy and shallow, has a few good ones lurking about. A friend of mine one day hooked a good four-pounder there, and it instantly "weeded" him. Without the slightest hesitation my friend went in, up to his middle nearly, and scooped him out with the net, weeds and all—a dangerous experiment for a not very strong man.

The rod I made for fly-fishing for myself was a composite weapon, that would hardly be kept in stock by an ordinary tackle-dealer. It was in three lengths, about fifteen feet long, built up of a bit of very good and tough lancewood; but greenheart or split cane will do as well. Now this rod was what an ordinary man would call top-heavy. It was rather powerful, because I had several things in my eye, as it were, when I made that rod. First, I wanted it to lift a good length of rather heavy line; second, I wanted it to stop a chub when using a very strong lake cast among the flags, weeds, and boughs; third, I wanted it for an emergency that very often occurs in fly-fishing for chub. When casting over the wide shallows, and just before you make a fresh cast, the fly sinks somewhat; perhaps before

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you tighten up, a chub takes the fly under the water. I have jerked them a foot into the air before I knew they had got it. Rods have gone at the ferrule time and again from this very cause. The ferrules on my rod were five-eighths of an inch in diameter on the butt, and nearly six-sixteenths of an inch on the centre, measuring inside the ferrule; this rod was whipped every half-inch or less from end to end. In addition, I carried in my bag a short handle a foot long; this made a powerful eleven-foot rod for the weeds, flags, bushes, and dangerous backwaters.

I had a gentleman down one day, and he brought with him a five-ounce ten-foot split cane. I never saw a rod collapse so quickly as that one did. The first chub he hooked weighed 4½ lb., and before he stopped it and got it out the steel-centred cane kinked in two places, and was utterly ruined. It was no good for that work, no matter what the featherweight experts may say. My long landing-net got that big chub all right; but I had to be an onlooker for the rest of the day; and at night my friend's arms and back were as bad as he had ever felt them before. Still, I had to keep a sharp eye on my rod, in spite of the hard work it entailed. That rod used to throw all sorts of things—slugs, snails, beetles, cockchafers, frogs, and cherries, as well as a black gnat and the larger chub flies.

For this work I used to prefer an ordinary Nottingham wood reel, three inches in diameter, fitted up with a movable check; this was far better for chub than a small brass or bronzed fly winch, that had a small winding drum. Forty yards of Allcock's Standard (F size) Waterproof line level was the one I used, this being strong, not too heavy, nicely pliable, and would go against the wind. Casts for work in the backwaters and under the boughs should be of stout gut, lake casts being about right; while for the shallow streams, places free from obstructions, and in the open water, a tapered cast, from very stout down to Ix gut, will be the thing.

Chub flies are many and various. I saw a very good pattern one day, if it was rather on the large side; it had

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a body nearly as thick as an ordinary pencil, ribbed alternately with black and yellow wool; it had a long yellow tail and a couple of well set up dark grey wings; the hook was a No. 6. The patterns that I have found killing on many waters are :—

The ZULU. This is a black-hackled fly, body not dressed very full, and a few turns of silver tinsel round the body, hackled with black hairs, pretty plentiful near the shoulder, and a red wool tail.

The ALDER. Peacock's herl body, dressed rather on the big side, with a couple of dark brown speckled wings, legs a sort of a rusty black or brown.

The GOVERNOR. Body dressed very full, of peacock's herl, and finished off at the tail with a few turns of a very bright orange silk, legs reddish brown. Wings are various; sometimes they are like the speckled feathers of the turkey, same as are usually put on the Alder; sometimes they have wings of hen pheasant's feathers; and sometimes, for evening and night work, they have wings like a grey drake. This is a very favourite fly of mine, and has killed numbers of fine chub; in fact, for night fishing I prefer it to the Coachman.

The WICKHAM FANCY. This is another good chub fly, and is a very showy one for bright water and sunshine, as it glitters in the water like a gold minnow; body is gold tinsel: a good brush or bunch of red hackle at the shoulder, and the same, but more sparingly, all down the body between the turns of the gold tinsel; two or three long strands of the red hackle for a tail. The wings on this fly are various, sometimes light and sometimes dark. I think it is a starling's feather that is on some I have here.

The COACHMAN. This is one of the very best of evening flies, and is dressed of very dark peacock's herl, as full as ever you can do it, with legs of red hackle, and a pair of the whitest wings you can get; the main thing, in my opinion, with this fly is to have as great a contrast as possible between the colour of the wings and the colour of the body.

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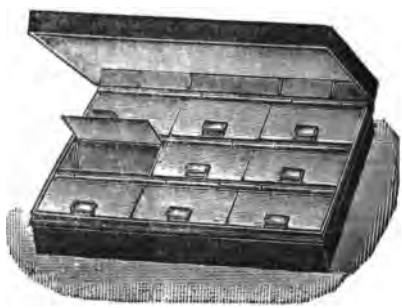
The BLACK PALMER, with silver twist, has a body dressed very sparingly, with several turns of silver tinsel; a good brush or bunch of black hackle at the shoulder, and sticking between the tinsel; no wings, but a good tail of white leather is an improvement.

That is a list of six chub flies that will be found equal to any water and any season—at least, from June round to October. Eyed hooks are the best, and No. 8 will be plenty large enough; but whatever you do, when fishing the weedy backwaters, always put a good bunch of gentles on the hook, or a couple of cadbaits, or a few wasp-grubs.



USEFUL CHUB FLY BOX, FOR EYED FLIES
NINE PARTITIONS
See page 103

It may sound a bit suspicious, but somehow or other I never could get the very large chub unless I did it. I don't know whether a chub can see in the dark, but it looks very much like it, because one of the very best times to try the shallows is when you can only guess at the position of your fly. I have had a brace of three-pounders from the Trent and Ouse when I could not see the end of the rod, and all the rest of the day had been a blank. One fly at once is plenty.

In night fishing with the fly for chub you ought to know your ground, and in making the backward throw, before the next cast, keep the line well up and sweep it well over

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your head, avoiding any chance of running the hook into your flesh or clothing in the darkness. The great secret of making a good and clean cast with a fly is not to hurry your forward throw too much; your line should extend to the utmost limit behind before the forward cast is made, or you will crack your cast, or else tangle it up. Chub are a bold-rising fish, and generally take hold in earnest when they mean it, rising sometimes and chopping at the fly with a sounding splash. You need not take the trouble to put the fly on the water as light as a thistle-down; chub rather like it to drop with a sounding flop. These fish have been friends of mine for many years, and I have had good days, bad days, very heavy fish, very small ones, and blanks in plenty, from more than half a score different rivers and streams when wandering forth with a fly-rod in search of chub.

In concluding this chapter I will give you one more experience. There was one famous spot for chub down the Trent in the old days that swarmed with those fish when all was quiet. It was impossible to get on terms with them from the bank, the water being very shallow, not more than three feet ten yards away from the old wall. Just before the dusk of evening I have seen the whole length of that shallow literally alive with chub. I should say the stretch was quite four hundred yards in length, and along a good deal of this distance there ran a wooden wall that at low-water time was some eighteen inches above the surface. The fish used to get as near that old wall as ever they could; anyone walking along the bank would scare them instanter; they would rush to midstream with a mighty splashing, and afterwards even a fly thrown on the surface caused them to bolt. Fishing in the daytime there was a waste of time; we had to wait till nearly dusk, and then drop the boat down the centre of the stream, at least twenty yards from the side—a big flat stone or slab trailing behind the boat, at the bottom of the river, in such a manner that our progress was only very slow. I got at last so expert at that dodge that I could nearly hit the exact spot blindfold;

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and my companion was also so expert in guiding the craft that my work was easier.

I soon found out that the best plan was to throw the fly a very long cast on the edge of the wall, and then quietly jerk it off into the water. One of those fish would have it like a shot. Strong tackle was the order of the day; by its means I could haul them quickly close up to the boat without any disturbance whatever. I remember one evening with a big Coachman fly that was garnished with a bunch of gentles, getting twenty-seven of those chub, that weighed fifty-nine pounds. We had that swim all to ourselves for three or four seasons, going to it about six times during July. After August got well in the chub left it for the deeper water and the boughs. I must have had several scores of them during those seasons; it was indeed a famous scouring ground for them. But as the seasons went on, they got shyer and shyer, and half a dozen fish was considered a good bag before I left that locality. A good fly for evening work was a Silver Doctor, small grilse size; but chub always preferred any fly garnished with plenty of gentles. A tin box with partitions is far and away the best for eyed flies.

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CHAPTER XI

EDDY AND STREAM

(CADBAITS AND WASP GRUBS DURING THE EARLY SUMMER)

Fishing down the shallow streams—The outfit for it—Hook baits and ground baits—Cadbaits and wasp grubs—Famous shallow streams—A good bag of chub—Dock grubs.

THE long days of summer, as soon as ever the yearly close time has expired, appeal to the sporting instincts of the angler, in a general way, as no other time can. They love to bask in the lovely sunshine, to feel the gentle breezes that blow so softly down the valleys, and watch the bursting vegetation as it rapidly expands to all its wonted magnificence. There are thousands of fishermen who would never dream of going out in fog and frost, who only think of November and December with a shudder. But they miss one of the very greatest joys in a true angler's life; they miss the keenness and the pleasure of a day among the winter grayling, the December chub, or the January pike. As soon as October gets well in these men put away their rods and tackle, and scarcely ever look at them till leafy June again comes round. In this chapter I shall perhaps please this summer angler specially; for I propose to deal with summer fishing pure and simple; that is, so far as one branch of summer fishing is concerned, fishing the streams with a float; and to give some idea of what can be found during the months of June, July, August, and September.

The shallow streams of any running river that has any pretence to be fairly well stocked with fish, are very nearly alive during the early part of the season. There are various

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reasons for this; the early dace, chub, and roach have nearly completed their family cares and arrangements, and have got into these streamy shallows for the purpose of cleaning and recuperating themselves. The weeds in these shallows are full of insects; caddis grubs of various kinds are constantly hatching, and all the different life of the river bed is in an active condition. Naturally the fish follow, and it is in such places that sport must be sought. The bright and active little dace is the earliest fish to get into condition, and he is a restless little chap. Any one who has got his eyes can see him gleam, and twirl, and dart, now and again rising to the surface; ever and anon a whole school of them splashing all together, when some prowling perch or a shadow perchance has alarmed them. They are sportive little fish, and respond gamely to the persevering angler and his judiciously used ground-bait.

Shallow streams that flow from a weir or a mill-pool, or the streams that gallop along over a sandy bottom, with long, waving weeds, in scattered strings, and ribbons, and tufts, are places that delight the early fish. They are here, there, and everywhere, heads up stream, holding the current with scarcely an effort, half turning now and again to snap at some floating morsel. The stream sweeps them away when doing this; but the next instant they recover, and the old place and the old position are gained. We see at times a heavier swirl, and the water rolls over in widening circles—a chub or a barbel has joined the foray; while now and again the red fins of a perch or roach can be seen gleaming through the shallows.

This is a good time for the early stream fisherman, whether he uses fly or float; and many have been the baskets of mixed fish I have landed during the last forty years when stream fishing during the early summer. For this branch of angling the tackle should be as light and as handy as possible: everything should be fine, as far as line and tackle are concerned, at any rate; for, bear in mind, it must be selected so that long distances can be cast, so

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that the bait can be swum down a long way without the slightest check or hindrance. The line should float on the water, and the strike at a bite on the instant, prompt and effective; a line sunk to the bottom will not do this.

A Nottingham rod is the rod, above all others, for this work, and it need not exceed ten and a half feet in length—a good East India cane, with a greenheart top and a balance handle, being the thing. It should have fair-sized safety rings, and need not weigh more than fifteen ounces; and in my opinion it should not weigh less, as this rod will have some work to do, such as lifting a long length of line at end of the swim, and mayhap killing a three-pound barbel in a strong stream. All this tells on a rod, particularly under the ferrule of the middle joint; and so I always see that my rods are well set up and fairly powerful. I would sooner dress the top down fine, and let it spring well, than have the slightest weakness below the ferrule on the centre joint.

A centre-pin reel is a necessity for this fishing—of that I am convinced, one of three and a half inches in diameter being the very best; and this reel should run at the slightest touch, so that the line runs off without jerk or catch. I prefer my centre-pins to have aluminium flanges and back plates to the barrel, so that wet and swollen wood is not an evil to contend with. I don't care for check actions, nor yet line guards; but still, the former adjunct is extremely useful to the novice, in more ways than one. A centre-pin reel should always be kept so clean and so well oiled that any sort of a stream down which the float travels should cause it to revolve by itself; the old days of blacklead for the inside of a reel, in order to make it run free, are gone for ever.

The line can be fifty yards of fine plaited silk, of sufficient substance and strength as to lift a dead weight of six pounds; but it should on no account be thicker than stout sewing thread, a fine strong line in this fishing being a necessity; and it should always be well greased. "Gishurstine" is a good thing for a line, although I made a

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very good shift with a bit of composite candle for many years.

The float for this style should be a short and stumpy swan quill, and it need not exceed five inches in length, a long, thin float for a shallow stream being a nuisance. If the float is about as thick as an ordinary pencil, and will carry half a dozen fair-sized shots, it will be right, because in this stream fishing you want a little extra weight to keep the bait tripping along the bottom.

A few two-feet lengths of undrawn refina gut is ample, with gut hooks to suit the fancy, but say Nos. 9 and 10 Crystals.

THE "OTTER" WADING NET
WITH SPRING CLIP AND KNUCKLE JOINT

These will be right size for cadbaits, grubs, gentles, and small red worms; and if the gut is stained a sandy brown, all the better. I like these fine wire bait-hooks to be bright steel, gilt hooks, bronzed hooks, and black hooks being a delusion and a snare, and liable to either straighten out or break at the barb.

In fishing these streams I found that ground-baiting should be done on the instalment plan, little and often, all the time sprinkling little bits down hot in the track of the float; and this ground-bait can be a big tin of carrion

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gentles, mixed with an equal quantity, or rather more, of damp yellow sand, or a few handfuls of bread and bran, mixed very stiff, so that it also shales away down stream in tiny fragments; or the plan of a Sheffield angler, who ground his bait up in a small machine and cast the fragments little and often in the track of the float, may be adopted. Good yellow cadbaits, those that you find sticking to stones and submerged timber and sunken boughs, on the bottom of shallow, streamy places are useful. Some of the very largest and brightest cadbaits I ever saw were procured from where the waste hot water of a brewery ran into the stream. These are the finest early baits you can use. I can remember many years ago cadbaits being plentiful, and the dace in pretty good order down the Trent, in the middle of May.

There was one stream that ran from a weir, not more anywhere than three feet in depth, except the weir hole itself, from which I got time and again good bags of mixed fish—dace, roach, chub, white bream, perch, and sometimes topped the basket with a brace of three-pound barbel. Cadbaits during the early part of the season were a deadly bait, and no mistake; a couple on a No. 9 or 10 hook, cast out into the stream, and allowed to trip along the bottom for ten, twenty, or thirty yards, generally resulted in a bite of some sort. All down the Trent for miles was good early water for cadbaits: anywhere in the vicinity of a weed-bed, where a clear run of water ran by the side; in the eddies behind projecting banks; behind old sunken trees, or land-slips, where the bank was mended with stakes and faggots. In fact, this sort of fishing during the early summer is essentially sport for the roving angler, and can be entered into with as much zest as the most ardent fly-fisher could show. I have had as many as six, eight, and ten fair chub during a day, by this plan; there were miles of water on the Trent that I could roam over, and not exhaust its resources.

Gentles and small red worms are also good for this time of year and for this style of fishing, particularly if a summer

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flood comes down the river; but in this case the eddies and slacks can be tried, and stret-pegging, or long-corking, or float-legering, whichever you like to call it, can be indulged in, the float being in the eddy near the bank, held back, and some eight or ten yards below you. If any sort of a stream is running outside, the fish generally drag the float down like a shot. There are many streamy rivers that this style is particularly adapted for; it used to be one of my favourite plans. The little river Ousel, that runs from Leighton Buzzard down to Bletchley, in Bedfordshire, was a famous little river for cadbaits and large roach; if the water could only be caught on the rise after heavy rains, a big bag of roach, running from three-quarters of a pound up to nearly two pounds apiece, could be relied on, in addition to very large perch and chub. I have seen three-pound perch and four-pound chub from there, all taken on the big yellow cadbaits.

The Witham, in Lincolnshire, below Grantham, between Syston and Barkstone, used to be a favourite early summer haunt of mine. This river was very shallow just there in places, winding and twisting about most wonderfully, with a nice little rocky pool in nearly every corner, and sometimes skirting the edge of a thick wood. I remember one hot July day I tried to fish the swim under the shade of that wood; but a plague of flies, more vicious and venomous than ever I encountered before, drove me away, after getting a pound trout from under an old stump. As a naturalist, that stretch of the Witham used to interest me; I could generally see one or two rare birds there, and the butterflies were numerous. I got one day a pair of silver-washed Fritillaries, and saw a beautiful great spotted woodpecker; in fact, I was so busy watching that bird that my rod was nearly pulled out of my hand, and I struck so hastily and with such right good-will that my tackle parted, and a moment later a good two-pound trout sprang a couple of feet in the air, with part of my tackle hanging from his jaws. I was annoyed; but still, it was all in the day's sport.

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That stretch of the river was a capital place for the use of cadbaits during the early summer—trout, chub, dace, perch, and roach, all being found in my basket at one time or other. I cannot remember a stream that I fished this time of the year with cadbaits that did not yield sport, more or less in abundance, and all of them gave pleasure. It is a delightful time, even if some of the fish are not in first-rate condition. The great thing for the young fisherman to remember, when fishing in the early summer, with the baits recommended in this chapter, is that he will meet with more sport down the shallow weedy runs, or in the eddies behind sunken trees or projecting banks, than he will by trying the very deep and sluggish places.

It was from this little river that I saw a very large dace captured; the water was stained by a heavy thunderstorm, and a friend dropped a red worm in a little eddy, not eighteen inches deep. It was instantly taken by a fish that turned out to be a dace, weighing no less than an ounce and a half over the pound, by far the largest I had ever seen up to then. Dace in that river ran larger than they did in the Trent; we frequently got them from Doddington and Claypole going from ten to twelve ounces; while in the latter river six or seven ounces was a very good average fish. My largest dace from the Trent weighed 10¼ oz., and I got him when bream-fishing in a very deep swim with the tail end of a lobworm.

A little later in the season we fished those shallow streams and eddies in much the same way as we did with the cadbait and gentles, using this time wasp-grubs. These are deadly baits to use in a bright water during August and September, and many have been the bags of chub that have fallen to a bunch of wasp-grubs. I prefer these grubs just as procured, always thinking them to be more attractive than if prepared in any way. Some anglers broil them, some steam them, some smear them all over with treacle and bake them in an oven; but I prefer, after storming the nest with a damp gunpowder squib and removing the cakes, to use them as they are. They are rather tender on the

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hook; the best grubs for the hook are the yellow juicy ones, that have neither wings nor legs; the ones that are more advanced, and have turned white, with clearly defined legs and wings, can be, along with the cake itself, crumbled up into fragments and cast on the stream in the track of the float, and you will soon know if any fish are in the swim. They will begin to rise at the floating morsels, and your chance of getting a good fish or two is nearly a certainty.

I remember once going down the Trent where an old stick weir, or artificial bank or breakwater, whatever is the best name for it, stretched for some considerable distance down the centre of the river. Nearly at the far end the action of the water had cut away a breach and formed a small eddying pool, not more than twelve feet long by eight or nine feet wide. Into this little pool during a push of water some chub would congregate, and when the water went down again they could not escape; and the lucky angler who knew the spot, and was the first to go, would have some sport: of that I had ample proof during several seasons.

There had been an early flood that year. The season commenced with a river running bank full, and a tremendous stream; and it was weeks and weeks before that old stick weir was fishable. Then another heavy rain fell, and there was another flush; so it was quite the latter end of August before the little eddy could be visited. I knew of a wasps' nest, so went and dug it out, and next day fished the hole. I found five feet of water and the stream curling round and round; a couple of balls of ground-bait were broken up and cast into the eddy, and the grubs did the rest. I got fourteen good chub from that small hole—largest 3¾ lb., smallest 1¾ lb. I expect they had been on short commons and were hard set, as they did not exhibit the usual shyness and caution of chub. This wasp-grub fishing lasts about a month or so, from the middle of August to the end of September, and is one of the most certain methods of getting a few fish when the water is low and bright, and sport difficult to obtain by the ordinary means. Once, in par-

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ticular, two or three of us had gone down to Dunham, and found things awfully bad, barbel and bream dead off, and nothing except a few roach and flounders likely to reward us. I got the mail-cart driver to bring me a hamper of wasp-grub cakes from Newark; and it was only by a stroke of good luck that we got those grubs. They were rather too far gone, and disputed the possession of the cart with the driver. He said he was tempted more than once during that seventeen miles drive to heave the lot into the hedge bottom. We found one cake in splendid condition, and under those old willows in the shallow stream below the bridge we got a very good catch of chub and dace—something like a dozen of the former fish among them.

During the season trout are very partial to wasp-grubs. I have had some very good ones at one time and another; but when fishing the streams and eddies for trout and chub you should use a slightly larger hook than for dace with the cadbait, a No. 6 or 8 being better than a No. 9 or 10; and don't be afraid to use a few grubs, four or six being none too many; let the float swim away down stream a good many yards: for of all the plans I know in fishing, this summer fishing with cadbaits and wasp-grubs is the one in which the Trent man's motto of "Fine and far off" must be reduced to a science—every item of your tackle being of the free and easy order, neat, fine, and easily manipulated.

Another bait that is much affected by a summer trout or chub is a dock-grub. This is a bait difficult to procure: I have known a hard day's work with a spade to result in only a dozen grubs. These grubs are generally deep down among the roots of the dock; they look like a big wasp-grub with a dark head, but are much darker in colour, being a creamy yellow, or rather a creamy brown. Trout during the summer are caught on these grubs; I have known as many as six brace a day to be had from a very small stream, when even worms or cadbaits scarcely secured a brace.

There is one thing that I always impress upon the young angler, and that is: when floating a stream for dace, or chub,

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or trout, never let that float go quite so fast as it would like. Always hold it slightly back, so that in actual fishing the bait goes first. I have put this in the forefront more than once; it is so important that I am tempted to repeat it here. The bait must not trail behind the float; a very slight checking, or gradual holding back of the float, is quite enough to accomplish this object.

I was nearly forgetting to mention a capital bait for chub during the season now under notice, and that is a bit of St. Ivel cheese, about the size of a hazel nut, on a No. 5 short-shank, sneck bend hook. This cheese wants no preparing whatever; it can be used on either float or leger tackle, and dropped in all sorts of places—across the eddies and streams, and under the boughs; white-heart cherries can also be used in the same manner and during the same season.

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CHAPTER XII

PIKEY DAYS AND PIKEY WAYS

Pike and pike fishing—Haunts and habits of pike—Curious instances—Spinning for pike—Haunts of pike—How to play and land a pike—Good rivers for pike—The outfit for pike.

"*ESOX LUCIUS*" is a fish of character, for whose special benefit a whole host of spinning flights and tackles, myriads of live-bait snaps, and hosts of artificial baits in every shape, size, and colour, have been invented. No other fish has had such inventive genius expended on him. If the whole catalogue of these separate and distinct things could be written, the result would be bewildering, and the onlooker, who knew next to nothing on the subject, would say: "Why, here is a fish that requires a whole museum to store away the tackle necessary for his capture."

But the young angler can take comfort from the fact that all this display is not really necessary, a few well-chosen and skilfully used tackles being quite sufficient for all ordinary purposes. I knew a very old pike fisherman who during his lifetime had captured many hundreds of jack, big and little, and I should question whether his whole expenditure in tackle ran to more than one shilling per hundred pounds' weight of fish.

Pike, taking them all round, are solitary fish, not often discovered in huge shoals like barbel, bream, or roach, except in very special circumstances. Generally they are lonely tenants of a quiet, reedy corner, away from the rush of the main stream—sole kings of a small domain, ready to pounce out at a moment's notice on any unwary small fish that happen to stray within striking distance.

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During the summer and early autumn they do roam about a bit, the weedy shallows and streams often containing many of them; and a deftly thrown bait, either natural or artificial, carefully worked over those shallows and in between the weed runs, very often proves fatal to numbers of jack. But there is one thing that must be said in connexion with this. During the early summer, while the jack are among the shallow runs, they are in the worst possible condition—long, thin, and slimy; not worth catching, and most certainly not worth eating. Spawning time for the pike is a long and trying period in their existence, and they take a considerable number of weeks to recover. In my opinion, based upon practical experience gained on a large and wide area of rivers and lakes, I say, certainly they should not be disturbed until October 1st; at any rate the middle of September should be fixed by all owners of pike water as the very earliest date for commencing fishing.

The pike is a wicked-looking fish when we confront his business end; but when we look at him sideways, in very many cases he is handsome beyond the run of most freshwater fish. I have seen pike from certain waters when the spots and markings have been superb—yellow, purple, green, and white mingling in a pleasing blend.

Pike, under favourable conditions, will reach a heavy weight, although I never heard of any so big as a fish mentioned by Pliny, the ancient writer, who speaks of an *Esox* which weighed a thousand pounds. We cannot identify this fish with the *Esox lucius* of the present day. If we say forty pounds, we are mentioning a weight very seldom reached; there may be some that size in Loughs Conn and Cullen, in Ireland, as odd ones from thirty to thirty-seven pounds are occasionally sent from there to the taxidermists. From eight to ten pounds is a fair jack; from ten to twenty pounds is a good one; from twenty to twenty-eight pounds is a very fine one; anything over the latter weight can be set down as exceptional.

A very old friend of mine, a pike fisherman and naturalist of wide and long experience, told me one day that he

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believed two kinds of pike existed in English waters. One sort would reach a weight of thirty pounds, while the other would never exceed four pounds. And he named two small sheets of water as going a long way to prove this. These sheets of water were only about eight miles apart, about the same in size and general surroundings: bottom gravel, weeds, flags, and rushes alike in each; both fed from small hill streams; each had good roach, tench, bream, eels, and perch. Good fish of all those classes he frequently got from both of them; and yet in all his thirty years' experience in the two places he never got a pike or saw one that exceeded four pounds in one, and in the other he had taken several from ten to nearly twenty pounds. This is a curious thing, and worth noting.

We are told by men versed in these matters that a baby jack will reach a length of eight inches in his first year of babyhood; will increase to fifteen inches in his second; and he may, under favourable conditions, reach four pounds when he is three years old. They give him a lease of life of forty years; but he reaches his greatest weight before he is fifteen, after which he gets gradually thinner and thinner, as old age creeps on him; his eyes grow dim; his teeth turn black and soft; his body goes to eel-like proportions; and his head looks uglier and more wicked than ever.

It was a fish like that which Mr. Robinson and I got one day out of a backwater some little distance from the Trent. We saw some moorhens swimming across, when all at once there was a tremendous swirl, and one of those birds was missing. It was several weeks after that before we could go fishing; but one day we took a can of dace, and tried all over the place, with no result. At last we got a small jack of a pound or so, and put him on a huge gorge tackle; that small chap lugged three or four large pike floats about that pool for an hour, and we thought it was no go. All at once the little jack struggled to the surface, and raced away, with a huge wake in his rear; floats and bait then disappeared. We walked round the field for twenty minutes, and then played him out. Disappointment was

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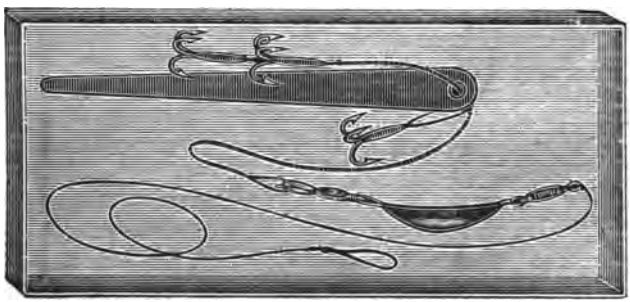
written deeply on our faces when that pike was landed; he measured fifty inches by the tape, and only scaled seventeen pounds—a dirty, disgusting brute, one of the very worst I ever saw! We got one out of the Great Ouse one day nearly forty inches long, and it only weighed 6¾ lb. Another brute!

In some of the huge and lonely tarns of Sweden a curious sight time and again greets the eyes of the explorer: a ghost-like figure is seen to be slowly drifting about the surface of the water, driven hither and thither by the breeze. The native hunters and fishermen who happen to penetrate into those remote regions, regard the thing as an omen of ill luck, and



THE "TRENT OTTER'S" FLIGHT, SHOWING THE ZINC STRIP, THE LOOSE LOOPED TREBLE, AND THE DROP SPINNING LEAD

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look upon its appearance as the preliminary to some dire disaster, they give it a wide berth. Other travellers, who came to close quarters with the phenomenon, found it was the skeleton of a huge eagle or osprey, that some time or other had pounced down upon a basking pike, and embedded his talons so firmly into the flesh of the fish that he could never extricate them. The fish was too heavy for the bird, powerful as it was, to fly away with; and the pike, in its turn, could not dive down to the bottom, being hampered by the bird, and so the pair miserably perished; and it was the skeletons, which had probably drifted about

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for years, that caused such consternation among those superstitious fishermen.

Pike have the credit of being a bold, fearless, and voracious fish, often chopping at a bait without any intention of swallowing it. It is not often they are frightened out of their wits without any apparent reason; but once, in the west of England, a strange thing happened. There was a reedy, weedy backwater, very bright and very shallow, and a number of very large jack could be seen in various places. There was scarcely a single clump of reeds but it had a tenant; they could be plainly seen, bodies in among the reeds, and their heads just sticking out. A can of splendid dace was procured, and a gut paternoster was thrown quietly from cover, and gradually worked back to one of the largest—a fish that must have gone at least ten pounds. When the dace got opposite his nose, instead of coming out and taking it he backed away deeper into the reeds and weeds. The same thing happened in two or three more places; and finally a very large pike was tried. As soon as ever the bait got within a foot of his nose he shot out of the rushes and went up stream as though the very furies were after him; you could see the wake of him for several hundred yards. Not one single fish was got. My friend would have it that the sight of the bait had scared them; but I put it down to caution and cunning—they could scent danger. It is the only experience of the kind, however, that I can remember.

A good many years ago the late James Chatterton, T. Sunman, and myself, baited the Corporation swim at Winthorp on the Trent, and for a time we had fair sport; but all at once we could get nothing, not even a solitary bite. Towards evening my friend hooked a small chub, and in bringing it to bank it was seized by a good jack, which went off with that fish and part of his tackle. I had suspected the presence of pike in the swim earlier in the day, and here was strong confirmation of my suspicions. Next day we procured some dace, and ran snap tackle all over that swim, with the result that thirteen good fish were captured, rang-

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ing from fourteen pounds to four; after which the barbel and bream again came on the feed. A month later Chatterton got ten more out of the same place, but they ran much smaller. This is an occasional occurrence—for pike to pack themselves into a baited swim; if it is suspected, a live bait should always be tried.

A friend of mine, who took the sporting rights of an estate in Scotland, found a well-stocked lake there; but nobody, as far as he could learn, had ever fished the place except one of the servants, who had occasionally got a pike or two on a lump of fat bacon. A can of live fish were absolutely useless; not a single run did he get. This was rather surprising; so one day he got a couple of large frogs, and these speedily accounted for three good pike, one frog being used twice. The last time I heard from him he said he had ordered two or three dozen of the largest frogs they could procure, and would have a full day at it, as he believed there were some very large pike in the place; and nothing live except frogs seemed of any use whatever. (There are dowarger or frog pikes in many ponds that will not look at anything else.)

I got an invitation from a farmer one day who had on his farm a very large disused brick pond. He said it had been stocked with pike many years before. On arriving there the place did not look promising. I went nearly round it, but never even saw a moving jack, until I again nearly reached my starting-point, and there the fun got fast and furious, eight or ten fairly good fish being had in the last hour of the day. I should say all the jack in the place were in one small corner, a space less than one-tenth of the whole area. Those fish were got on an artificial Clipper.

One of the most enjoyable holidays I ever had was spent in Wales, late one autumn. It lasted only three days, but much was crowded into that short time. I stayed at the Royal Goat Hotel, Llanymynech, and fished the river Vyrnwy, and found chub, roach, pike, and an odd grayling. The pike were taken from an abrupt corner where

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the river widened and eddied round, a good deal deeper than the usual thing there. A local man called the place the Gutter Pool, and it was the only spot there where I found a jack, and a few flags growing round the margin. All the bait I had were only a few dried gudgeon; but soaked a bit and threaded on a small flight, they accounted for nine of those jack inside an hour and a half, which weighed exactly forty-five pounds. They were very nearly all of a size, and the handsomest pike I ever saw—spotted, mottled, and coloured marvellously. I went down those valleys for several miles, and spun everywhere that I thought looked a likely spot, but never got one anywhere else except those nine in the Gutter Pool.

It would occupy too much space to recount even a tithe of the days I have had among the pike on river, lake, and stream—some good, some bad, and some indifferent; but once a friend and I found a dozen good pike in a small corner: they had hardly room to turn round. We found out afterwards that a tree had blown down, and smashed the barrier that was erected at the end of a private lake to keep the fish from going down a narrow drain that ran some three or four miles, and then emptied into a public river. Those jack were fairly stranded, and must have been on short commons, as they came at anything that was thrown to them.

I have had as many as two hundred and twenty pike during a single season; and most of my pike-fishing, except in a few cases, has been had in public water. These fish—in a well-fished public river, at any rate—seem to be getting either scarcer or more crafty every year.

The Hampshire Avon and the Dorsetshire Stour seem to have a pretty fair stock of pike in their waters; while Norfolk and Suffolk still maintain their character; and all down the Great Ouse pike can be met with. Some very good pike are taken every season from many places on the Trent; and the Thames, in several of its free fishing waters, holds good pike—that long stretch from Shiplake, Sonning, and up to Reading, being pretty good at times; while

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all the water from Pangbourne upwards can be live-baited or spun over with some chance of success, the holes and eddies in the vicinity of nearly any of the weirs being the surest find on the whole river.

As I said in Chapter VIII, if there was one thing more than another that I delighted in, that one was spinning for pike, and I should say, at a rough guess, that quite four-fifths of my pike have been so captured; once even I got four more fish by spinning the dead and used dace than my companion did with the live bait; and this was in a good private lake, where we should have supposed lively Thames dace was more likely to attract the sluggish pike of a lake. But the month was September, and I stuck to the weeds and shallows; so that was one thing in my favour. Had it been January, the result would easily have been reversed.

During September and October, while the jack are lurking about the shallow weedy runs and the streamy tail-end of weirs and overfalls, particularly if the water is clouded, a good artificial bait is as clean and as good as anything. Should the young spinner be puzzled at the great variety of baits, and wonder which would be likely to be the most useful, he can take comfort from the fact that all artificials are pretty much alike in their general characteristics, and not much choice can be made. If he can only afford, say, a couple, he will find a bright silver collapsing spoon—mounted on a bar, so that the spoon itself swings loose, and the treble hook covered with a bunch of red worsted—and a four-and-a-half-inch Wagtail to be the very best he can use. These two have been tried under nearly all conditions, and if pike are inclined to feed I know of nothing better—that is, as far as artificials are concerned, and if the spinner does not want to be troubled with much impedimenta.

If in using a natural bait, such as a sprat, a dace, or a bleak, the angler would like a spinner, so that he should have as little trouble as possible in baiting, he cannot do better than buy a couple of Bedfords. The most useful sizes for baits from five to six inches long are Nos. 3

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and 4, the cost being one shilling and sixpence each. The Bedford spinner is the most certain I know, and grips a tender bait firmly, the blade being thrust down the mouth, until the fans are close up to the nose. The spring hook at the side goes through the bait, and the eye in the blade, and fastens on the other side. The stiff blade that goes nearly the whole length of the bait holds it rigid, so that no buckling or doubling can take place. This is a very useful spinner to use in rather heavy water and down the weir streams, or where long casting is necessary. In these places an ordinary flight that has no supports soon tears the bait out of all shape, and it was this consideration that made me put a small addition to my pet flight, as mentioned in Chapter VIII. Before dropping the extra side treble down the gimp, as there recommended, I had a very thin and narrow strip of zinc made, about three-eighths of an inch wide at one end and one-eighth of an inch at the other, and from four and a half inches to six inches in length, with a hole or eye drilled in the larger end. The gimp of the flight was threaded through the eye, and the strip passed down the bait from nose to tail, taking care that the strip of zinc was long enough to go through the bait, and allow for half an inch at the thin end to be bent back tightly, so that it gripped the bait at the tail, or at least the root of the tail. Then the loose looped treble could be dropped down in its place. Of course the main two-treble flight is threaded through the bait first, and the hooks fixed in position as recommended in Chapter VIII, before the zinc strip is thrust down, and, finally, the loose looped treble is dropped into position, and all is ready.

Now this flight answered every purpose of spinning a natural bait, as far as I was concerned, the zinc strip protecting a tender bait like a sprat or a bleak admirably. I have spun over waters far and wide, and diversified in their character—the Trent, the Thames, the Ouse, the Witham, and several others, besides railway cuttings, lakes and ponds, still water, weir holes, and streams—and I have no hesitation in saying that the spinners and artificials here

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mentioned are quite enough for anywhere and any conditions, viz. the flight with the zinc strip and the Bedford for natural bait; the collapsing spoon and the Wagtail as artificials.

I have seen some anglers spinning with a trace that was at least two yards long, with four or five swivels at intervals all down its length, under the impression that this quantity of swivels above the lead would prevent any possibility of the line kinking; but I always found that too many swivels defeated the angler's object, and caused a kinking rather than preventing it. I found that if the trace was a yard long, perfectly plain, and had a drop lead, with a swivel on either end of the lead, it was far and away the best. The spiral lead is a pretty good one, as it can be taken off and replaced as circumstances require; but for deep and heavy waters I like the drop lead with two swivels, fair on the end of the trace. When spinning over small shallow streams, or cuttings and backwaters that have no depth of water, the lead must be dispensed with; everything, under these conditions, must be as light as possible, and no more disturbance in the water than can possibly be helped. Heavier, deeper streams and rivers must have a fairly heavy lead, on purpose to carry the bait down quickly. If the lead weighs from three-quarters of an ounce to an ounce it will be ample for any purpose. Traces can be made from either copper gimp, Hercules wire gimp, twisted gut, or single salmon gut, the latter for choice if the water is clear and the river well fished.

In spinning from the reel with either naturals or artificials, if anyhow possible, the bait should not be hurried: it should sink well down; it should be worked by a series of sink-and-draw movements; it should be thrown down-stream and worked up against the current; and it should be thrown up-stream and spun down with the stream. When a good jack takes the bait, and he is nearly at the surface, so that you can see him, don't strike while his head is towards you, or you may jerk it from his mouth; wait till he turns, and even then don't strike sharply, but draw

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on him heavily, making him pull for every foot of line he takes out; this will hook him more firmly than striking hard. If he takes the bait deep down, wait a second, and draw the same as before. You stand the biggest chance of losing a pike when you think you have nearly got him killed. I have seen pike roll up to the surface and turn belly uppermost; then, without any warning, stand as it were on their tails, with half their length out of the water. Many times a pike and I have been grinning defiance at each other like this. He shakes his head like a terrier, and if you keep a tight line on him out fly the hooks. It is all done in a moment. The best plan is to drop your rod point, then the jack rolls over, and you will very soon have him.

When landing a pike on spinning tackle, or snap for the matter of that, and a landing-net is employed, do not on any account put the net over his head, because there might be a loose treble outside his mouth, which might catch in the net, with the result that the pike could not go in, but would roll over the other side, and his weight tear out the hook that is in. I have seen several jack lost like this, and they usually have been good ones. Always see that the net is put up behind the fish, over his tail, and bring him out as quickly as possible.

In using a gaff for a heavy fish do not strike at the fish with a vicious stroke. I have seen gaff handles broken by this plan, and the frightened pike make a despairing rush that in not a few cases resulted in an escape of the fish. Always put the gaff over the fish as near the gills as possible; do it very gently, and as soon as you feel the gaff is well over draw it sharply and pull him to the bank at once, before he has time to kick and plunge.

I should not care to give a catalogue of all the waters I have spun over from the Trent to the Thames, and from the Lincolnshire fens to the district of the Great Ouse, nor yet the bags of pike I have had, mixed up with indifferent and blank days; but I may say that I have been fairly successful everywhere in this branch of our sport; and my tackle

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and equipment have been of the very simplest kind. Good sport can be had at a small outlay for tackle; of this my whole fishing career has been an ample proof.

There is plenty of water for a day's spinning at Littleport, in Cambridgeshire. As soon as you leave the station, and reach the white bridge down stream, you can commence, and spin away down to Southery, where the Little Ouse comes in. There are miles of fairly good spinning water all down there: water fairly deep all along; banks open, and plenty of cover for the fish; reed and flag beds in plenty. Here the bait should be sunk well down, as the water, generally speaking, is from eight to ten feet deep. It is advisable to spin direct from the reel, as these waters are lined pretty thickly with vegetation. Lower down, from Southery to Hilgay Fen and Denver Sluice, there is fairly good jack water for spinning; and I might add that a very comfortable inn stands at the junction of the two rivers. A pleasant and profitable day or two might be spent there. The Little Ouse, from Brandon down to Southery, also is worth trying; and the same can be said about Earith Bridge, another station beyond Ely. There are miles of good water all down here, stretching to St. Ives on the one hand, and up the Old West River towards Willingham on the other. All these waters seem out of the beaten track, and I know by personal experience that the whole district is well worth a visit. The water is for the most part free. I have known bags of half a dozen fish, from ten pounds downwards, to have been taken in a day's spinning, which should be good enough for any ordinary man.

The most pike I ever got in a well-fished public river by spinning, in one day, numbered twenty-one; but only six of them went over five pounds, so I returned fifteen to the river. The best day's bag, spinning on a public river where any one could go, contained seven fish, weighing forty-three and a half pounds, and the smallest fish went within a trifle of six pounds: a splendid level bag of jack, which has never before or since been equalled by me on any public

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river or stream. Both these catches were had on the Great Ouse. The nine fish I got one evening in Wales were one and a half pounds heavier than the seven just noted; but the river could hardly be considered a well-fished public river. I give these two or three instances not by way of boasting, but I believe that a reader likes to know how the author has got on under all and any conditions.

There are also two nine-pounders that I cannot forget; one came from the Ousel at Leighton Buzzard. I was perch-fishing with a fine gut paternoster; the hook was only a No. 13 treble, just inserted under the back fin of a tiny dace; the weeds were much in evidence, and the place very much cramped. That fish fought for a full half-hour, and I finally landed it without net or gaff, just as my friend Dan Pantling joined me for the rest of the day's sport. He was too late to see the fun.

Another nine-pound pike I got on a two-inch silver Devon. I was on the top of a weir, and noticed some big perch close up to the rushing water. I did not trouble to change my line, which was the ordinary one that I used for chub. I simply took off the gut hook, and looped the Devon minnow on instead, using my fine gut tackle as a trace. I threw it into the foaming eddy, and he had it in a moment. I spent an anxious half-hour after that. Again and again he dived down to the very depths, lumbered into the boiling water of that overfall, and three or four times leaped into the air. I was all alone, but I landed him at last.

These incidents stand out as landmarks in my fishing career.

But I was describing the Ouse and its jack fishing, so I will here mention that, going up the river towards Oakley and Sharnbrook, permission can be obtained from the agents of the Duke of Bedford. There is good jack spinning all down those reaches, and so on down lower towards Bedford—in fact, I found no difficulty in getting plenty of free water to spin over all the way down to St. Ives, except in a few instances, where it was preserved by

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local associations. Between St. Neots and Paxton there is a capital stretch, from which I have had many good jack, including three in one day, on sprats, that went 10 lb., 8½ lb., and 7¾ lb. There is a huge field here for a wandering angler to roam over; I spent eight years in the locality, and must say that as a sporting time and a field for sport with the rod I never found any other district that exceeded it.

The river Nene is also another good spinning river for jack, and I believe permission can be obtained, although free water abounds in many directions. I think from Castor down to Alwalton, near Peterborough, there is some free water. I saw a catch of pike from there one day—nine fish, largest fourteen pounds. Whittlesea and March are also in the sphere of influence for jack—in fact, I scarcely know where the angler would be wrong in any of the eastern counties from Lincolnshire to Cambridge and Suffolk.

I have mentioned the Thames once or twice, but I might say again that the stretch in the neighbourhood of Sonning is a noted pike reach: fish up to twenty pounds and over have been caught, and more than a hundred pounds have been taken in one day. Right up above Goring there is good jack water for the spinner. The collapsing spoon seems to be as good a bait as can be tried all down those reaches; while a bleak or a sprat on a Bedford spinner has killed many and good fish there. I advise a pretty powerful rod to be used, same as recommended in Chapter VIII, one weighing about two ounces to the foot all told; a good centre-pin reel, four inches in diameter, with a movable check, and a line guard, and if it is fitted with aluminium flanges at the back of the barrel all the better; one hundred yards of medium undressed line that will lift a dead weight of eighteen pounds is good enough. The tackle that I recommend in this chapter, together with a handy gaff hook, I may say the whole outfit, including artificials and all, should not exceed fifty shillings.

But while on this point of the outfit, I should like to say that there was always one thing that puzzled me more than

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a little, and that was when a man went after barbel in a weir hole, and expected fish up to seven or eight pounds, he was contented with medium gut for his tackle; whereas the same man, if he went after jack, and never expected one any heavier than three or four pounds, was not happy unless the tackle was stout gimp, and the line capable of standing a dead strain of at least thirty pounds. It is strange, when you come to look at it. A line and trace that will kill a barbel in a weir hole should be good enough for pike, although jack hooks themselves should be dressed on gimp, or the Hercules wire gimp, as some protection against the sharp teeth of those fish.

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BURES MILL

ON THE SUFFOLK STOUR

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CHAPTER XIII

THE POSTMAN'S KNOCK

(DIBBLING WITH INSECTS, ALIVE AND DEAD)

Chub and their peculiarities—The postman's knock—The dibbling outfit—Baits for dibbling—Frog and chafer fishing—Dibbling for rudd and perch—Sink and draw.

"*CYPRINUS CEPHALUS*" is a funny fish; I look upon him as a humorist of the highest class; there is a merry twinkle in his eye when you observe him closely from cover and he is ignorant of your presence. What can be more humorous than a situation something like this? After an infinite amount of creeping and crawling an angler settles himself on the bole of an old willow tree that overlooks a chub haunt; he knows a giant chub lives there, so he prepares everything, and leaves nothing except the strength of his tackle to chance; and in nine cases out of ten this is woefully deficient. He has a box containing several different kinds of living creatures: here a long-horned beetle is embracing most lovingly a tiny frog; there a bluebottle fly seems to be holding an argument with a five-spot burnet moth. There is a mixture of insects and reptiles in that tin pocket-box that ought to please the most exacting chub that ever lived. Our angler flicks one of the insects down on to the tiny pool below, and it strikes out to swim away; but a huge white mouth intercepts, and a slight gulp follows as it is promptly swallowed. A second and a third and perhaps a fourth inmate of that box speedily join the first. There is no hesitation; they are sucked in with the greatest promptitude, and that chub is hastening round and round, looking

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for more of the good things that have so unexpectedly fallen. Now our angler lowers one down so carefully, with the hook just under the covering of his back or wings, that it looks exactly like the others that went the same way. It also begins to tread the water like a thing of life, and Mr. Chub says to himself, " Here's another," and rises for him. Our angler nerves himself for the coming struggle ; but that joker of a fish comes within an inch, and then sidles away in various directions, inspecting it from the right, from the left, and from below, as much as to say, " Now, I wonder if that is a bit of prime old Stilton, or what ? " And you can see the joke in his eye as another similar insect is dropped down beside the hooked one. He winks the other eye as that one goes down ; but the one with the hook in it—" Oh, no ; that will never do," says he ; so finally giving it a smack with his tail, he retires into his old fortress under the boughs, and you feel inclined to hurl a brick at him.

This is no fancy picture, but one that I have seen many times, particularly in those streamy backwaters and small rivulets in the district of the Great Ouse ; streams that are hidden away in many places by a dense growth of weeds and bushes, where no other plan is possible to capture the big chub that are lurking there than to dibble a live insect on the surface.

There was a postman lived there who was a marvellous adept at this business, and could lure those cunning old chub at odd times, when everybody else was in despair. We used to call it the " Postman's Knock," hence the title of this chapter ; and I have known him to haunt a particular bush during his spare hours for a month before he managed to get out the three or four inhabitants of it. It was a postman's knock with a vengeance, knocking at the door of those chub for a month before they condescended to reply. I remember one lovely day in August—I was having a ramble after butterflies—seeing my friend the postman treed ; he was on the top of a thick willow, and beckoned me to him. Quietly crawling up the stump,

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I cautiously followed the direction of his finger and saw one of the smallest pools imaginable; it was not more than five feet long by three feet wide, and probably about three feet deep, and shut in by a dense growth of trees and bushes. The deepest place was under the old stump. The water eddied round the willow, and flowed towards a thick bed of weeds that seemed to project from the old tree itself. The whole stream was not six feet wide. My friend dropped one or two of his insects down, and presently one of the largest chub I ever saw came out from cover; it was quite seven pounds in weight, and looked in magnificent condition. The postman was on his mettle, because I was an interested spectator; he alternated his hooked beetle with loose ones; but the one that had a hook in it was severely left alone. At last, on my whispered suggestion, when the fish refused it, he lifted it from the water and dropped it behind him close to his tail. I don't think I ever saw a chub take a bait quicker; he wheeled round in a moment, and had it like a flash. The rest of the adventure can be described in a few words. On feeling the steel the chub made a headlong rush into the jungle of weeds below, and half the tackle only came back the next moment; the water was ridged as though a steam plough had been driven beneath it. My friend said he had never calculated the cost, and how it would have been possible to land it from such a place, where the only coign of vantage he had was up a tree, some seven or eight feet above the surface of the water.

Now in some streams this method of fishing seems to be nearly the only one that can be indulged in, under certain conditions at any rate. Shallow, streamy runs, overhung with bushes and luxuriant with weeds, down which a fair current wanders, very often contain chub, roach, and rudd, and usually they are the very largest of their class. I know of many streams of a like character, out of which very many specimens have been enticed. In this bush fishing I always found that if you could see the fish, and so hide your movements that they could not see you, then your chance was

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good, if your patience held out and you could ring the changes on all sorts of oddments in the shape of baits. It is not a hard matter to hide yourself, because the fish in a general way hug the boughs; and they delight in a clear, gravelly, shallow run, even if no more than a foot deep. The first job is to hook the fish, and the second to get him out when hooked.

For this sort of fishing my friend the postman made himself a rough rod: you don't want a very elaborate affair, a stout East India cane being plenty good enough. The postman's rod was about fifteen feet long in four lengths, the three pieces of cane being about four feet each, and a stiff top something less than a yard long. The whole rod should be stiff, rigid, and strong, mounted with very small upright rings, which should be of hardened steel, so that if rubbed over a bough they would not be pressed flat to the rod. The butt itself need not have a ring on, for reasons that will be explained presently. A set of winch fittings about seven inches from the end of the butt should always be insisted on; and also another small set on the second joint, so that the rod can be instantly changed from fifteen to eleven feet, as the circumstances of the place require—hence the butt has no ring—and the changing from a long rod to a short one, and back again to a long one, can be done very quickly, by just shifting the reel from one set of fittings to the other.

There was one of my friends who once made a rod so that the line went through from end to end inside; even the top itself was hollow. This we thought would save a lot of trouble, and the line not likely to be entangled in the bushes; but somehow he could never get it strong enough in the joints and top for those five-pound chub when hooked among the weeds, and it speedily collapsed. A plain three-inch wood reel and twenty yards of stout undressed barbel line will be ample; and this line must be strong, because it is impossible to play your fish out; you must jerk them up to the surface at once, keep their heads above it, and land them as well and as quickly as possible.

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No gut line is required, the gut hook itself, with its twelve inches of stout gut, being plenty; and if this hook is a No. 6 square or sneck bend, it will be found the best. A small drilled bullet about the size of a green pea completes the outfit. The bullet should be on the silk line, close to the loop of the gut hook.

All sorts of things can be used on this tackle, the trouble being to find out what not to use; butterflies, moths, beetles, snails, slugs, frogs, cockchafers, huge hairy caterpillars—any insect, in fact, that creeps or flies will do, care being taken when fixing them upon the hook to do it as carefully as possible, so that the motion of wings or legs is not hindered in any way. Now this is a job that requires a considerable amount of patience; you must be as still as possible and careful not to step upon any dried stick. Peep through the boughs as circumspect as you like, and when you have located your fish proceed with the utmost caution. As a preliminary, flick them two or three insects, if you anyhow can without betraying your presence. After hooking your frog by a little bit of the skin on his back, or the beetle by the edge of one of his wing covers, you wind up the line till the bullet is tight up to the end ring of the rod, and then turn the rod round and round until the gut of the hook is all wound on the rod, and none hanging loose. An opening can generally be found among the boughs through which the rod can be insinuated; and then mark your chub, and quietly let that frog or beetle tread the water like a thing of life, care being taken that not one inch of the gut or the bullet hits the water. I fancy that if the insect is dropped near the tail of your marked fish he wheels round and grabs it without so much of the hesitation that he displays if it is flopped right over his nose.

If a fish takes the bait and is hooked, hold him tight, with his head above the water; and if you have selected a place where the landing-net could be fixed beforehand, slide him to it, and if possible into it, holding the net in one hand and the rod in the other, unless you could drop the rod on the bushes, in which case always see that the reel is free and

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line can run off, when you draw the fish and net towards you from under the bushes. After landing one fish from a situation like that it is all over with that particular swim, for an hour or two at any rate, and a fresh one should be sought out.

In using blackbeetles—the ordinary kitchen pest I mean—you will find a difficulty in getting them to float; they very soon get waterlogged and begin to sink. The best plan is to cut a very thin strip from a small bottle cork, and fasten this underneath the beetle with fine cotton—give him a cork jacket, as it were. This improves the appearance of the beetle, making him lively in the extreme, kicking out in all directions to try and free himself from the strange incubus that encircles him above and below, I make no doubt. One can hardly give a lesson in this style of fishing, because the angler must be guided by surroundings, and adapt his procedure to meet the requirements of the various places he tries, and the more or less awkwardness of the position.

I found this dibbling among the weeds, flags, and bushes of the Great Ouse to be a deadly plan for large rudd and perch, more particularly the former; and the insect that appealed to them more than any other was the cockchafer, or, as the country boys called it, "the May bug." This insect, dibbled on the surface during a warm, muggy August evening, accounted for several good chub and rudd. I remember one evening in particular seeing a swarm of those insects on and over a low furze bush. A sweep of my net secured a dozen, which were safely housed in an old coffee-tin. The evening was distressing and muggy in the extreme, the air so oppressive that breathing was difficult. On reaching the river, which was only a few minutes' job for me in those days, I found some big fish bulging under the surface. The river just there was weedy and shallow, with little runs here and there, and a very nice stream was also running. By dint of a bit of crawling I managed to hide behind a fringe of long grass, putting my fifteen-foot rod out to its fullest length. I dropped one of those chafers

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in a run between the weeds, and it was instantly taken by a three-pound chub. Before it got too dark to see I had landed nine fish—four chub, three rudd, and two perch. Not one fish was less than two pounds in weight, and two of them went over four pounds each; and the curious part of it was there were four more anglers trying on the bottom for roach and bream, and not a bite did any of them get. I always found it was better for surface dibbling, or even casting a natural or artificial, when the weather was the same as it was on that evening, than trying for either bream or roach on the bottom.

Chafers and frogs can be fished in two different ways—one by dibbling them both alive from the cover of bushes and undergrowth, and the other by casting them dead across the open shallows and streamy runs. I don't know which of the two plans has been the most successful in my own particular experience; but one thing must be noted, and that is, the fly rod, as recommended in Chapter X, will be better than the stiff cane, as recommended in this chapter for bush fishing, when the open water is tried, and dead baits have to be thrown some considerable distance.

In using dead frogs and chafers the tackle should be made in two sections, a double hook, with upstanding points, being the best in both cases; and this hook should be dressed on a single length of fairly stout gut, with a good big loop at the other end. The loop at the end of the main cast should also be fairly large, so that the bait could easily pass through when you had to part the tackle for re-baiting. A four-inch baiting needle should be used with either of these two baits; and in the case of the frog, which should always be killed by giving him a tap on the back of the head, the needle should be driven into the back of the neck and brought out between the hind legs, which latter can be tied, with the aid of a bit of yellow flax, at full length on to the gut. The hooks should lie on the head with the points uppermost. The same hook and tackle will do for the chafer, and this should be baited with the needle, driven completely through the insect, with the hooks at the head

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end. In using the frog as a dead bait it should be cast into all sorts of openings, or down the runs, or under the boughs, and allowed to sink as deep as the place will allow, and then worked home with the reel in a series of sink-and-draw movements, covering as much water as you can possibly reach. A small frog is a splendid summer evening bait for chub when it is next to impossible to get them by the ordinary bottom-fishing methods. And in this fishing the chub has a right good sporting chance; I have seen a frog smashed all to atoms by a chub many times, and then not hooked.

In using a chafer I prefer the same tackle as for the frog; only instead of working the insect home by a series of sink-and-draw motions it should be cast across and up stream as far as ever you can, and allowed to float down stream and across towards the bank on which you stand, only lower down, as far as the cast will allow.

Tom Bentley, a very old and experienced friend of mine, always used to have a light Trent cork float for both frogs and chafers, but no shot whatever on the gut line. He would have it that this float, fixed about a yard from the bait, kept the insect from sinking too deep down; but I preferred no float at all, as I fancied the float caused more commotion on the water than was quite wise. I might say that the gut cast can be one, two, or three yards long, according to the swim or the angler's fancy, and it need not be too fine.

The biggest catch of chub I ever saw taken on any bait during a summer's evening was had on a chafer, and numbered forty-two fish, ranging in weight from 1 lb. to 4¾ lb. apiece; and they were taken in June, and only down the length of two meadows—less than half a mile of the Trent, at any rate. That catch could have been increased, but the bait was exhausted, and no more available. I once had a beautiful bag of a dozen good rudd, every one over the two pounds, from the Ouse one July evening. I don't think I ever saw rudd rise so freely to the chafer as they did that evening. This was also a case of the bait getting

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exhausted, and no more to be found. Perch also have taken them when they have been tripped and worked over the shallows. Ripe white-heart cherries are also good for chub during the summer when those fish are on the shallows; but a treble hook, a No. 9, will be the best for this bait. The stone should always be removed, and the hook put fair inside, so that all the points are just covered.

One of the very best bags of chub I ever saw was taken many years ago; there were twenty fish, weighing eighty pounds, and the curious part of it was the whole twenty had to be weighed before the largest could be found. The smallest was an ounce under four pounds, and the largest was an ounce over: a most extraordinary catch, the like of which I have never seen or heard about since. The captor has the largest and the smallest preserved in one case, and often refers with pride to that day of days.

Rivers and streamy backwaters exist in many directions where this fishing can be indulged in—in fact, some of the very finest days and catches I have had have been so obtained. It was a chafer down the Trent that got me my 5¾-pounder; it was a frog that got me a similar one from the Colne; and it was a gudgeon that got me the very largest of my career from the weir pool at Offord, on the Great Ouse; but this fish never was weighed. I took it to Campbell, the taxidermist, on my way home, and he forgot to weigh it; but when set up, and compared with a handsome eight-pound jack he had there, we found the chub exactly the same length and more than an inch deeper, so we put it down as being nearly an eight-pounder.

One day I got a hurried glimpse of a giant chub that had its home under the woodwork of an old weir, in a small stream known as Fisher's Dyke, that ran into the Great Ouse near Hemingford. I worried about that chub a lot, and tried him a few times with no success; but one day I found another fisherman had got him: a four-legged otter had been before the two-legged one, and there he lay, or at least what was left of him. His head and tail were quite fresh, but a lot of the flesh had been eaten away; he was

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twenty-five and a half inches in length, and his rib bones were nearly five inches long—the biggest framework of a chub I ever saw.

The middle Witham for miles of its course was a capital stream to dibble a live insect on, bush-covered haunts being very much in evidence in many places. I was spinning there one day with a small spoon, and noticed a chub under the boughs. I quietly dropped the spoon some distance below him, and spun it carefully up to his haunt; he took it in a moment, and I landed him. This is a common occurrence for a chub to take artificial pike baits, and even a small dace on snap tackle.

A capital plan during the summer, when water is bright and the stream somewhat deeper and more sluggish, is to sink-and-draw, and if you can do this from cover, same as recommended for surface fishing with insects, your chance of success is all the greater. A small float can be used, and three or four shots on the tackle some six or eight inches above the hook. Crouch behind flags or weed beds, or low bushes, and drop the bait, which can be a couple of cad-baits or wasp-grubs, into all holes or openings among the weeds, and let it sink down. Now and again, as an expert once said, "show the fish the bait," by raising it to mid-water. Sometimes, after the bait has been on the bottom for a minute or two, and is then quietly raised, an enterprising fish will seize it—in fact, I have known several pounds of good roach, rudd, and perch to be taken during a hot afternoon when they would not look at anything else.

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CHAPTER XIV

DAYS AND NIGHTS WITH THE BREAM

Bream and bream fishing—Roving bream—The bream angler's outfit—Ground-baits and hook-baits for bream—Bream in the Ouse—Bream on the Broads—Bream in a tidal river—Trent bream—Curious incidents.

I CATCH myself wondering now and again as to how many times I have baited up a bream swim; how many thousands of lobworms have been sacrificed; how many stones of greaves have been pounded up and boiled; how many loaves of bread have been wasted; how many bushels of bran have been soaked up; how many miles have been tramped; how much has been spent in train fares; and how many hours have been put in, since that day long ago when I caught my first bream in a Lincolnshire canal. I look over the catalogue, and am nearly appalled; the list ranges over forty-five years, and comprises waters that stretch from Spalding, in Lincolnshire, to the Trent; from the Trent to the Nene; from the Nene to the Ouse; from the Ouse to the Wey; from the Wey to Norfolk; and from Norfolk to the southern tidal rivers. I should say that the total cost would be nearly enough to buy an old-age pension. But has the game been worth the candle? I say it has, and I have never regretted the hundreds of hours spent and the piles of bait expended in my search for bream, but look upon the experiences as the brightest and most contemplative in my fishing career, seeing and getting an insight into nature and nature's mysteries that a stay-at-home never sees or gets into close contact with.

Bream are queer things; generally speaking, they are a

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summer and autumn fish, being very seldom seen in some waters during the winter; the lower tidal waters of the Thames between Isleworth and Teddington being an exception, as bream are frequently caught there all through the winter months; and the same can be said of some of the southern tidal rivers. The roach fishermen now and again lumps into a big bream that makes his roach pole creak, and sometimes walks off with part of his line.

On the Ouse and kindred waters we very seldom see them until late in June, when they come to the surface in huge shoals, and swim backwards and forwards for a few days, until they settle down into their regular holes and haunts. Now and again during this period of their career they wander into strange places and get into considerable trouble; shoals of them sometimes are in a three-foot shallow, and also get three-quarters of a mile up a backwater or a shallow drain, or rooting like pigs in the sand and mud, where the water has not been more than a foot deep; now and again threading a weed bed in every direction, and colouring the water below them for yards, so that other small fish are reaping a merry harvest.

This is a fatal time for the bream. Time and again I have known huge bags to have been made while this roving instinct is so strong on them; and as for baits at this season, I have known them to take anything indiscriminately—boiled wheat, paste, worms, gentles, cadbaits, scraps of greaves, or nearly anything, it did not matter much, the bream were not particular. I have known a shoal of bream to be hunted all over a shallow broad, casting a slowly sinking bait to them, all day long; the fishermen never quiet, the bream on the shift. Wherever the water was seen to be on the move and discoloured, there the fishermen followed; and those shoals sometimes have been sadly thinned during that week of shifts and rootings.

But as soon as they settle down in their usual summer and autumn haunts, they make up for the recklessness they displayed a little earlier, and get cunning and crafty beyond the usual run, sometimes refusing to feed for days at a

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stretch. I have sat hour after hour, and not a movement of the float, and yet I knew that bream were there, and quantities; every now and then a huge fellow would roll up to the surface, his bronzy sides gleaming like gold; and, as if to put the finishing touches on his insult, the broad-fluked black tail waves above the surface in a derisive farewell. But I did not mind these demonstrations: I could very patiently wait their good pleasure, because the fish were there, and it was only a question of time as to when I should get a little of my own back. It is no good, under these circumstances, shifting about to fresh swims; keep on tiddling the ground-bait in; fish all the evening till you cannot see the float; get up in the morning before you can see to thread the line through the rings on the rod; and fish all day and every day; and the time comes—it may be three days first, or it may be only three hours—when the float rises in the water and then falls flat. You are all alert now, and fast and furious grows the fun. I have had twenty fish, going over fifty pounds, in an hour. On one occasion I had two rods out, and twelve times in succession I have had a big bream on each rod; as soon as one rod was laid down, and the hook of the other baited, away went the first, and before it could be played a yard the other followed suit. I have had ten good fish in the half-hour, and then all at once not a move; hour after hour passes, and not another fish. I have known the whole of my day's sport to be had in half an hour. The longest time I ever knew the bream to be on the feed was seven hours one first of September, down Houghton Wale, on the Great Ouse, and during the whole of that time scarcely three minutes elapsed after landing one but what I was playing another. Broken tackle and hooks, fish insufficiently hooked; and yet, after giving away to various people half my catch, the residue was fifty fish weighing one hundred and twenty-six pounds. Brandling worms was the hook-bait employed; ground-bait was bread and bran, mixed with half a peck of farmyard barley and half a quartern of common meal, altogether about two pailfuls. We had fished the place for

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two days, and hopes ran high because bream were incessantly rolling up.

Ground-bait must be constantly dribbled down a bream swim if you wish to get a bag of fish. This of course applies to late summer and autumn, when the fish have settled into their regular homes and haunts. When they are roving about a little earlier ground-bait does not so much matter, although a few handfuls will be extremely useful; the great thing then is to find the fish, and follow them up when found, casting over them with a tackle that has no shot, except two or three large ones close under the float, and let the bait slowly sink towards the grubbing fish.

Bream are fish much sought after by anglers generally, scores of men holding the opinion that no distance is too great, nor any trouble too much, if there is a reasonable chance of getting a bag at the end of the day; and the outfit need not be of a very elaborate character. I always prefer running tackle for bream, the roach pole and tight line plan being open to so many mishaps and breakages. A rod from thirteen to fifteen feet long will be the weapon for bank fishing in such rivers as the Great Ouse, the Nene, the Wey, the Mole, and the district of Norfolk and Suffolk, as, generally speaking, these rivers are deep and sluggish. For rivers like the Trent and Thames a good chub rod, from eleven to twelve feet, will be the best, and this can be used from either boat or bank. For the bream of those rivers a good three-and-a-half-inch centre-pin reel will be required, and fifty yards at least of stout chub or barbel line—undressed silk, not too coarse and always kept well smeared with tallow candle. Vaseline I don't like; I have fancied it rotted my lines more than once, so I don't use it now, and candle seems to be as good as anything to keep your line on the surface. For quiet waters like the Ouse and Nene a plain three-inch reel will do; and if you use running tackle, one or two yards of good sound medium gut plenty. Hooks can be crystals ranging in size from 5 down to 9, and the gut can be varied from 1x to regular. Floats need not be too large, a good nine-inch porcupine or a seven-inch

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Thames cork being ample to fish the waters just named; and the angler must be guided by circumstances as to what depth he fishes. Sometimes they take a swimming bait a few inches from the bottom; sometimes, and this is more usual, the bait must be well on the bottom—in fact, so much so that the float stands slanting out of the water, quite half of the shot being on the ground.

The most important point to observe in bream fishing is to select a suitable swim, and attend most carefully to the ground-baiting. Ground-baits are many and various; I remember once getting a swim ready for a couple of friends, who joined me for a three days' holiday, at Brampton Wale, on the Great Ouse, one lovely September day. The ground-bait I prepared was composed as follows: Two pounds of good chandlers' greaves or scratchings, pounded up small and boiled for an hour; the liquor was then drained away and reserved; four pounds of bread soaked in the liquor just named for several hours; two pecks of bran; one peck of brewers' grains; half a quartern of hog meal, or middlings, as it is called; and a similar quantity of common chicken or waste wheat, the latter being about half cooked. The whole of these ingredients were mixed together into stiff balls as big as oranges; we had over a hundred of these balls. That ground-bait is as good as can be used during the summer and autumn on the sluggish waters of the Nene, the Ouse, and the eastern counties. Sometimes the men of the Cambridge fens add a pound or two of cotton cake to that bait, which probably would be an improvement. The swim we baited up that September day was in the meadow nearly against the iron railway bridge that crosses the river at Brampton Wale: deep water right under our noses, and a good bank to sit on. The bream were not on the feed; small roach we could get in plenty; but a bag of bream was wanted, and we tried worms, greaves, boiled wheat, gentles, and paste, but not one bream did we hook till the afternoon of the third day, and my friends were beginning to think that it would be a blank after all. But all at once they came on, and for three-

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quarters of an hour all rods were busily engaged; they ceased biting as suddenly as they started, and not one more did we get all the evening.

This was one of the occasions in bream fishing when all the sport was had in the shortest possible time; the bag had in it twenty-three fish, weighing on the station scales fifty-six pounds. Brandling worms were the most successful baits, not one bream being captured on anything else. We got the fish swimming down, just at the point of the rod: the bait about two inches above the bottom, and the float slowly crawling down the very sluggish stream. This was rather peculiar for a worm bait, as they usually preferred that lure well on the bottom, and quite still; in fact, sometimes it was fatal to even hold the rod in the hand, the slight tremor communicated to the float and bait by the hand being enough to wake their suspicions, the bait being more frequently attacked when the rod lay quiet in its wooden rests.

A friend of mine one day got a washing-tub full of bream from Littleport, in Cambs; and the bulk of his fish were very quickly caught, although they kept on the feed three or four hours, more or less rapidly the whole of the time. He had only baited up the place with a bit of soaked bread and bran for roach, and hardly expected such game as ultimately turned up. He was using his roach pole and tight line, with ordinary roach tackle and a No. 9 hook. At first he used boiled wheat, with only moderate success among the roach; then he changed to a bit of paste, made from a Huntley and Palmer's Town biscuit, fishing several inches above the bottom and swimming down the stream, which happened to be slightly coloured and running somewhat faster than usual. Before he retired from that swim he had broken every hook and gut line he had with him, landing about one fish in every three; and yet he filled a washing-tub with bream.

You cannot lay down a hard and fast line as to which is the best plan to adopt for this fishing, nor what is likely to be the best bait, although, taking it all round, the tail-end

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"THE HOME OF SOME GIANT CHUB"

THE WEIR POOL AT OFFORD, ON THE GREAT OUSE

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half of a maiden lob for river fishing, when water is fairly strong, and a striped brandling for the eastern rivers, seem to hold the preference; while lakes and broads divide the choice among all sorts of things. One lake a bunch of gentles takes the best; paste is more enticing in another; wasp-grubs in a third; and the coarsest lobworm you can find is the only attraction in a fourth. I say again the great thing to be observed is to attend carefully to the ground-baiting. This is important; on it the whole success depends; and even then I have had never a fish to show time and again; but I had the satisfaction of knowing that no stone was left unturned to ensure success, even if that day it came not my way.

There was one broad in Norfolk more than half a mile from the main river, but connected by a narrow dyke. This sheet of water was very shallow, and nearly choked up with weeds; nowhere was it more than four feet deep, and the clear runs were few and far between; but I don't think I ever saw more and better fish anywhere. There were rudd up to two and a half pounds; perch up to three pounds; bream up to four or five pounds; and jack up to twenty pounds, and not a few of them either. The place also swarmed with coots, the owner one day getting more than three hundred and fifty of those birds. The fish were the most aggravating of any I ever saw; it was not often they got on the feed, but when they did it was something to be remembered. I have known a pailful of ground-bait to be put in every day for a fortnight, sprinkled about in a dozen of the runs and openings among the weeds, and never a fish of any sort to show; and then one evening, that I shall ever remember, every fish in the place went stark staring mad. We used a heavy cork float, with a bullet close under it, no shot on the gut line, and baited the hook with the tail end of a lob, garnished on the point with a wriggling brandling, and hurled it out as far as we could. Sometimes that slowly sinking bait did not sink more than three inches before it was grabbed with such good will that the rod was nearly jerked away from us—first a

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bream; then a rudd; then a perch; then a big roach; now and again a fine tench; and so on. The fun lasted as long as we could see, and when the tally was taken the steelyards proclaimed the fact that two hundred and thirty-seven pounds of mixed fish had been slain. Next morning we were there again, but not a single fish; the place might have been a veritable Dead Sea for all the fish life we saw in its waters.

The last time I saw the owner he told me he had baited up and fished it more than a score of times since that day, and one catch only of thirty pounds had rewarded him during the last three years. Yes, bream are funny fish; you never know when they will come on: you can only ground-bait and wait patiently for the good time that will assuredly come.

One of the largest catches of bream I ever heard about for a day's sport was had at Hilgay Fen, on the Great Ouse, by a party of anglers on a visit there. They stuck to the one swim, and put an enormous quantity of ground-bait in—seven or eight loaves of bread, eight pecks of bran, a bushel of brewers' grains, and a peck of stewed wheat. The general factotum at the riverside inn there was constantly employed making up that bait, and putting it in a pailful at a time. Marsh worms, lobs, and brandlings were the baits used, and in three or four hours, on the last day, when the fish did bite, the four rods got more than three hundred pounds. But every fish they hooked over three pounds broke away, because the water was so bright that nothing else would do except No. 9 hooks on 2x drawn gut, and they all used a tight line.

The celebrated "Rookery swim" at Bures, on the Suffolk Stour, is a famous bream place, and some very heavy bags have frequently been made there. It is a rather deep swim, but the current is not strong, so it can be fished with light tackle. Once, on one of my visits, I saw a bag of fifty fish that must have weighed more than a hundredweight, and a brave show they made when displayed on the stones of the inn yard. But somehow I fancied they were not very

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good-looking fish; they seemed coarse, with big heads, and nothing so bright and handsome as their brothers from the Great Ouse; while their shape could not be favourably compared with the Ouse bream. But one thing is in their favour, when they do get on the feed they fight well, and a heavy bag can be anticipated, as they appear to be pretty plentiful. The water in question is in private hands, but I think day tickets at one shilling are issued at one of the inns in the village.

A friend and I once settled ourselves down for a night's breaming on the Great Ouse near Hartford, when, as midnight was drawing near, we heard a sound from down stream something between a cat-like hiss and a grating whistle, and this sound gradually got nearer. Presently we saw in the gloom a ripple on the water, and six otters landed within half a dozen yards—two large ones and four very much smaller—a family party, I make no doubt. They were making their way to a back stream. In about an hour we again heard that strange cat-like whistling hiss, and straining my eyes I saw one of the parent otters within ten yards with a large eel in its mouth. We were concealed among a dense mass of flags, and kept very quiet; jumping up all at once, I hurled a bait can at the intruder, when in alarm he dropped the eel and vanished. We had that eel for our dinner the next day, and right good it was. We frequently found the half of big eels on the banks of those back streams, left over from the otters' meals. I always fancied eels were their favourite fish. Some odd times we found a chub, but I cannot remember a bream ever being discovered half eaten by the otters.

I have tried the bream on those eastern rivers every hour that any local recommended; I have been at them before daylight in the morning; tried them at sunset; been with them during the silent watches of the night; and watched my float at midday; and even now I cannot single out any one time that stands over and above every other. I have had bream at all times of the day, and I have had blanks in plenty. The most I ever did get at one sitting were

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taken between nine in the morning and four in the afternoon, with a bright water and a brilliant sun. Perhaps the early morning is the best time, closely followed for choice of position by a warm, muggy evening, when the moon has turned the full and is in its last quarter; because I have found out by a long experience that when the moon is shining during the late afternoon sport among the bream is only very meagre.

Some of the southern tidal waters contain numbers of fine bream; but generally the shoals are on the move, particularly when the water is running, and after it has gone down to its lowest these fish are sometimes seen in strange places. A wideawake angler sees a little commotion in the water, and an extra colour just there. A few scraps of ground-bait and a pill of white paste, worked with a slight sink-and-draw movement, as the float travels down, very often succeeds in getting ten to thirty pounds of bream, when perhaps a dozen other anglers on the same water never touch a fish. It all depends upon the lucky man who finds the fish, and then fishes for them in a proper manner. Taking these tidal streams on the whole, it is either nothing or a heavy bag. I have seen half a dozen men fishing within ten yards of each other, and only one out of the lot succeeded in getting a catch of bream.

I remember once sitting on my basket for ten hours at a stretch, and during that time I got twenty bream, as near as possible one fish being landed every half-hour. This was the most curious experience I ever had; generally with bream it is either all go or nothing, fish feeding furiously for a few minutes, and then all quiet for two or three hours. I have sat in the punt all night, with an old carriage lamp shining on the float, and got nothing; and then another time I have got a pailful; they are awfully uncertain—blanks more numerous than the prizes.

On the Trent a baiting of lobworms seemed to be more effective than the general ground-bait used on the Ouse. I have helped Charlie Hudson to clip up thousands of worms, and scattered them down the deep hole of Dunham

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Dubbs. Tom Bentley and I have put them in the hole above Farndon Ferry; Sunman and myself have baited up Crankley Point, the Corporation swim at Winthorp, and the corner of Foottits Meadow below Collingham Wharf. We have tried the Sentry Box at the Meerings, haunted the cuttings and backwaters; but results, when carefully weighed and calculated, have not been up to the time expended. Once perhaps in every half-dozen outings a catch of bream has rewarded us; but we were always ready to go again and again; even if three consecutive outings were blanks, the fourth might pay for all.

One of the best places for large bream down the Lower Trent was in the neighbourhood of Marnham, Clifton, and Dunham Dubbs. There was a lovely eddying swim fifteen feet deep, about three-quarters of a mile above Marnham Ferry. You could trot the float slowly down at least forty yards, and now and again the takes of bream were very good indeed. A big Nottingham cork slider float was the one to use, and plenty of clipped-up lobs. All down those three or four miles of water were eddies, slacks, and corners, varying in depth from the thirty-six feet deep swim at the Dubbs, down to five or six feet, where bream could be got in those days, and floats would be wanted, from the huge slider, down to a six-shot swan quill. A five-pound bream I once hooked in the extreme depths of the deepest hole took me fully twenty minutes to get out; they strongly objected to leaving their home under the shadow of some old sunken barges. As the late Charlie Hudson used to say, "That worn't no putty un": by putty, he meant a common or small white bream. I repeat what I said in the chapter on the Lower Trent; that this locality will more than please the holiday angler who loves to be "far from the madding crowd." Curious names some of those Lower Trent swims have got; there are two grand barbel runs close to Marnham, that are known locally as "Putty Nob" and "The Land o' Cakes."

Bream appeals to the working-man angler as strongly as

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does the roach, the very uncertainty of their feeding adding to the charm; and the very uncertainty of their size is another charming factor. It may be a seven-pounder you are playing, or it might be less than one pound; they range, in my experience, nearly every weight between those two figures.

I have mentioned the river Nene more than once in these pages, and as the river and district can be set down as one of the very best bream and roach rivers in the midland counties, perhaps a few more details from my own personal experience would be useful.

Somehow or other I always fancied this district was not known to the anglers of London and many of the big cities; and yet it is one of the most splendid places an angler can stay at for his annual holiday. Going up the river from Peterborough the wandering angler will find a total length of nearly one hundred miles, diversified in its character, and coarse fish of all kinds, second to none in the Midlands.

Fair accommodation can be had at nearly any riverside village, and I found the cost did not exceed a sovereign a week, fishing tickets and food included. Between Northampton and Peterborough—that is, going down stream, although I might say the water is very sluggish—the fishing stations are Thrapston, Oundle, Wansford, Tichmarsh, and Castor, the last-named being about five miles from Peterborough. Castor is a capital station to stay at, bream being very good and plentiful; while the roach, perch, and pike fishing must not be despised. Close to this place is the celebrated mill stream of Water-Newton; the fishing is free, and the inn rejoices in the name of the "Fitzwilliam Arms," kept by Wm. Smith.

This district is also famous in history, as the ruins of Fotheringay Castle, the prison of the unfortunate Mary Queen of Scots, are in the immediate neighbourhood. Tichmarsh is another capital fishing place; this is about a mile from Thorpe station (L. & N. W. Railway). I think there is a small charge of sixpence a day to fish this water; but as there is very nearly three miles of it the charge is

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not out of reason. I found Wansford, a small place between Peterborough and Oundle, a capital fishing station. I got permission to fish the water from the owner, the Rev. W. Hopkinson.

The river Nene is not very wide, probably not more than from fifteen to twenty yards in a general way, four joints of a roach pole or a Nottingham rod being ample to fish it; boiled wheat and worms being the two staple baits for roach, bream, perch, and tench. The whole district is also one that appeals to the contemplative, rest-seeking angler.

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CHAPTER XV

BY LAKE AND MERE

Lake fishing—Spinning in a lake—How and where to spin—With paternoster and snap tackle—Public and private pike lakes and meres—Rudd in a lake—Fly fishing for rudd and roach—The outfit—Carp and tench.

A DAY on a private lake is always looked upon as the special tit-bit of an angler's life, no matter if he is restricted to certain styles and certain baits only. He is always in hopes of getting something unusual some time or other during the day, and have some specimen that when cased will always remind him of that day he spent on somebody's private lake. I expect many a fisherman can call such a day to mind when he got that perch, or pike, or carp, or tench, that now hangs on his wall, a silent witness to his skill, and a never-ending source of enjoyment and pride to himself and his friends.

The principal fish that are found in lakes are pike, perch, carp, tench, bream, rudd, and roach—a wide enough range to suit anybody, and a range of fish that can be operated on by several different methods. Lake pike are very uncertain in their feeding; but in a well stocked and preserved water it is a very queer time and a very bad day if half a dozen good fish are not landed. Sometimes the catch may border on the marvellous, and sometimes the angler may work all day, under the most favourable conditions of wind, weather, and water, as far as outside appearances go, and yet at night the bag is empty, and disappointment is written deep on his face. But still, taking a private lake all round, it is the only spot where certain sport among the pike can be relied on.

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It is the usual thing to fish for lake pike with a live bait; and if this live bait is something fresh—that is, brought from a distance, and totally at variance with the small fish that live in that lake—success can be depended on. Many a time I have had next to no luck when using baits procured from the same water; but when a stranger came down and brought his bait from a distant stream, why then the difference was most marked. As a general all-round bait for lake pike nothing beats a good Thames dace. I have seen and used dace from many streams, but I have not the slightest hesitation in saying that Thames dace from the tideway stand first and foremost. It is a funny pike who will have nothing to do with a Thames dace. I have even known the lower tideway dace to be more successful than local dace when used in the upper reaches of that river, the two being fished side by side. There is something about those sturdy, brilliant little chaps that appeals to you, and the way they can lug a pike float about for an hour or more shows something of their vitality and strength. They are never still; up to the last they keep working, and never seem to tire. Yes, a Thames tideway dace is a pike bait par excellence, and we cannot wonder that the demand for them has been enormous, and that the Lower Thames Preservation Societies are racking their brains to devise a scheme whereby this enormous drain of dace from their waters can be put a stop to or greatly curtailed.

Some lake pike won't take a live fish of any sort, preferring frogs or birds; but these are not very numerous, the greater number of lakes and meres that I have fished in being inhabited by pike who don't hesitate for a moment when hungry, and a lively dace is dropped over their noses.

Some owners of private lakes have an objection to live baits of any description being used in their waters, and only allow spinning, and even this has to be done with an artificial. During the early part of the season—say August, September, October, and November—this is as good a plan as can be followed, many and heavy fish being had on a spinning bait. But many lakes have such a superabun-

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dance of weeds all over that spinning is heartbreaking work; and even if there is a clear space here and there, nothing but a good stout artificial could be worked. In many places a snap tackle could not be used, a live gorge only being tolerated when every other plan failed.

Most of the private lakes I know are well kept, and open water in plenty that could be spun over; it is only some neglected tarns and meres that have ages of rotting vegetation accumulating year after year on the bottom, until the place is shallow and the crop of weeds more luxuriant every season. In some of these places huge fish abound, and that greatest of all abominations, a dead gorge, is the only tackle that stands the slightest chance. I have seen huge carp, tench, bream, and rudd wallowing and rolling in the watery jungles, vegetarians fat and lusty every one of them, and no possible chance of hooking one, or getting it out when hooked. There are many sheets of water to-day that might be made into paying fisheries if they were cleaned out and properly weeded; but succeeding generations of owners, who knew not the resources of the place, allowed them to be neglected, until to-day the task is well-nigh insurmountable.

When spinning the open waters of a lake, especially during the earlier part of the season, it will be well to hug the shallows and weed beds; and, contrary to my river experiences, I find that artificials are better and more effective than natural baits, when used in lake fishing. There may be more reasons than one for this. Somehow a wobbling roach, when mounted on a flight and worked in the clear runs of a very bright water lake, did not appear to have the same attractiveness as when spun down the clouded streamy runs of a flowing river. It never did work satisfactorily to me, particularly if the day was quiet and there was no breeze to ripple the water. A spoon bait was more attractive, and I don't consider a spoon to be a tip-top lure to work in a very clear lake. Under these conditions the bait should be as light as possible; heavy metal baits did not do well; the lighter they were the better the results,

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especially in the clear shallows and among the scattered flags and undergrowth. I found the best were a five-inch spotted Phantom and a Wagtail; both these baits are light, and if worked on a single gut trace and no lead whatever all the better. If the water is deeper, then a lead may be employed; but among the shallows and bright water, never. It is difficult to cast a bait like either of the two just named without a leaded trace; but by using a medium undressed pike line and a four-inch centre-pin reel I found no difficulty in getting out at least twenty-five to thirty yards, and this could be increased by using the Coxon centre-pin.

The largest pike I ever saw taken on spinning tackle was had on a brown spotted Phantom, in a private lake; it weighed next day no less than twenty-seven pounds ten ounces, and the trace was one of Messrs. Allcock's ordinary Hercules stout lake single-gut casts. This was a most extraordinary fish, as the usual thing on spinning tackle in lakes generally ranged from three to ten pounds. I made a careful calculation once, from notes supplied me by three pike spinners, who had the right to roam over river, lake, mere, and stream; and adding the figures to my own catches, I found that taking these pike all round the average size was only four pounds, counting all in.

Live-baiting and paternostering seem to be the best methods of getting the big pike of lake and mere, and in this style of fishing I cannot recommend the tackle to be gut, nor the ordinary wire-bound gimp. Snap tackle is the best, and a good stout Jardine all that is wanted. This tackle should be made of the Hercules wire gimp, oo size; it is not so visible in the water as gimp, or even twisted gut, and is exceedingly strong. Traces also should be of this gimp. I have seen a twelve-pound jack plough through a bed of rotting weeds, and this trace has severed them like the blade of a weed cutter. In fishing the deeper parts of a lake or mere during the latter part of the season the baits should be fairly large and used pretty deep down. I had the good fortune one day to attend a gentleman who had a

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permit to fish Clumber Lake, and the sport that day was of the fast and furious order; pike were feeding in every direction, and the well of the punt had many occupants up to twenty-five pounds each at night.

Even in using a paternoster in lake and mere, I should say still pin your faith on the wire gimp; always use a snap tackle, never more than one set of hooks at once, and make sure that the hooks are dressed on no more than four inches of the wire gimp. Jardine's patent paternoster is a fairly good piece of tackle; but somehow, in use, the wire that goes in the mouth and out at the gill covers drags the mouth of the bait open and buckles it up, hindering its free working. I like a fair-sized single lip-hook and a small treble, and this treble I like fixing lightly in the bait a little distance beyond the dorsal fin nearer the tail; the lip-hook itself to be firmly fixed through both lips, so that there is no chance of it coming away. A paternoster worked all over the lake as far as possible, searching all the weed beds, in among the runs, and every available place, has killed some of the finest pike the lake contains; in fact, I consider it one of the most deadly plans that can be adopted.

There are many lakes open to English anglers, and the procedure is very much alike in most of them. I saw a short article in the "Fishing Gazette" one day that interested me much. The writer recommended Shropshire, and its range of meres and lakes, as a profitable place for the wandering pike angler to try. The largest waters were Ellesmere, 130 acres, free and open to any one on payment of a very small sum per day. He mentioned a pike of twenty-five pounds being taken from there, and himself and a friend had fourteen fish one day, going from four to fourteen pounds each. He recommended the Red Lion Inn, close to the water. The other meres in the district are Blackmere, Kettlemere, Colemere, and a few others, all of which can be fished by asking permission of the various owners.

The same writer mentioned a very curious thing that

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I do not think I ever noticed or heard of in any of the lakes I ever fished, and he says it is peculiar to all those Shropshire meres. Summer visitors are particularly warned against it; locally it is called the "breaking" of the water. There is a great quantity of a thick flannel-like weed, which, after a spell of very hot weather, about July say, ferments and throws off a nasty green slime; this breaks up into minute particles, and remains in suspension in the water for two or three weeks, and no fish will feed at all until it all sinks to the bottom. This is worth knowing, as it may save intending visitors a disappointment, and enable them to select the proper time.

Somebody said one day that pike would soon be extinct in English waters, but this is all nonsense; they may get woefully thinned down in some of the well-fished public rivers, where restocking is only very scantily done, but pike nowadays are pretty wideawake customers, and have the bump of self-preservation pretty largely developed, besides which their powers of reproduction are very good indeed; and while there are so many private and semi-private lakes in England, stocked with pike as some of them are, it will be a very long time before this fish is extinct or even wears himself out, because he has not begun to deteriorate yet. There are certain well-known lakes that contain swarms of jack; you can see these waters gleaming in every direction—north, east, south, and west, many of the very best being under the very windows of the country's stately houses. There are three or four lakes in the Dukeries of Notts that as pike preserves are without rivals; there are many more that are open to fair and honest anglers, either by permission or the payment of a small sum.

Some two or three years ago a friend of mine got permission for a day in one of these waters; unfortunately I was prevented from going, and I never think of that day without a tinge of regret. At night he left me a hundredweight of fish, up to seventeen pounds each, and they only represented a third of his catch. I heard once of

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nearly five hundred pounds of pike being taken in one day from Horsey Mere, and I could swell the list from waters far and wide. Pike fishing in lake and mere is still a factor to be reckoned with; it will be many a long day before the fish are exhausted.

Another interesting and handsome fish that inhabits lake and mere is the rudd, although I may say I got more intimately acquainted with him on the Great Ouse and the Norfolk broads. He is a fish of the very first class, and in a lake or mere will rise freely to the fly, as, taking the rudd all round, he is a surface and midwater feeder. Rudd swarm in countless shoals in some of those places; but I never heard of them reaching such a weight in lake, mere, and reservoir as they do in the Great Ouse, the three-pounders of the latter coming down to two in the former. They are a summer and autumn hot-weather fish pure and simple, biting when nothing else will, and sometimes biting to some tune; for when rudd get fairly on the feed they make things pretty lively. They will take worms, gentles, wasp-grubs, and paste; and these must be cast over them as a slow-sinking bait. Use a fair-sized float that can be cast any distance, the necessary lead to cock it being close under the float, and no shot whatever below that. A couple of feet or a little more is ample between the float and bait, and the bait slowly sinks towards the bulging fish. You can rove about in rudd fishing, hunting them all over the lake, and generally depend on a catch when nothing else will stir.

The rod, reel, and line recommended for chub will do for this fishing; the line should be fairly fine and of undressed silk, and always kept pretty well greased, as it ought to float on the surface as much as possible. Ground-baiting, as we understand it for bream and roach, is not of much account in rudd fishing. I have heard of anglers who put it in, scattered over a wide area of water, and fish for them with a paternoster: a heavy lead on the bottom and two hooks, one about a foot below the surface and the other a foot lower down; throwing the lead as far as possible, and working it back all over the baited ground. In some of

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these lakes catches of rudd border on the marvellous. I have seen a hamper full of fish as the result of an evening's fishing. Odd times there have been a hundred fish, going as many pounds; and all the bait and trouble for a show like that has been only a few scraps of dry bread to float about the surface, and a small bag of brandling worms.

One of the cleanest and nicest ways of taking rudd and roach in a lake or mere is by the artificial fly, and these should be as small as possible, about a dace size, say No. 16 eyed hook; and the patterns need not be very wide, nor yet extensive, three or four carefully chosen ones being quite enough—Wickham's Fancy, Red Tag, Governor, Coachman, and Black Gnat, and all of them dressed as hackle flies, without wings. I gave the dressing of these flies in Chapter X, chub size; but for rudd they must be very much smaller and more sparing in the body and hackle.

There is a reservoir near Northampton that contains very large numbers of rudd, and they rise to the fly freely. I saw a catch of eighty fish, that went as many pounds, made in three hours one evening; and some of the broads of Norfolk, and stretches of various rivers in Huntingdonshire and Cambridge, all yield rudd to the fly or bait, and very often in considerable quantities.

Carp and tench are also denizens of a weedy lake, and generally speaking, they are, like the rudd, a summer fish, very few places being found where tench bite, to say nothing of carp, during the winter months. Tench are a good-looking fish, and not at all bad on the table; generally they feed on the bottom, being vegetarians in a great measure. Sometimes it is necessary to try them with a slowly sinking bait, as recommended for rudd. Worms, either tail end of a lob or a marsh worm, form the best bait; but sweet paste at times may tempt them. These fish are very uncertain; they can be classed with bream in this respect: now and again a big catch is made.

I fancy only four very large bags of tench have come under my own observation during the whole of my fishing

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career, and all those were in private lakes that had large quantities of them in their waters. It is a big catch of tench when two rods in an evening get a hundred, averaging exactly two pounds apiece. Tench used to be very plentiful in Lincolnshire when I was a boy; but their fatal curiosity, by being attracted into bow nets by a brilliant bunch of coloured flowers, sadly thinned down their ranks, and now we only get them in odd ones, or at most by twos and threes, from public rivers at the most lucky of our visits, private lakes, where they are preserved, being the only places where a catch is likely. I have heard of tench that weighed eleven pounds, but never saw one that exceeded six.

A good place for tench during the summer months can be found in the neighbourhood of the river Nene, in Northamptonshire. Book to Castle Ashby station, which is in close proximity to the famous estate of the Marquis of Northampton. There is a series of ponds on that estate which are well stocked with tench and other fish. I think there is a charge of two shillings and sixpence per day—at least it used to be so. Sometimes the sport is very good indeed. I saw a catch of thirty-seven pounds of good tench from there one day, and the captor told me they came out of the Grendon pond, near Castle Ashby. Anyhow, I know this spot used to be worth trying, and as it seemed out of the beaten track it was not over-fished. Close to the station is the Station Hotel, now kept by Mr. Slow, I think. Should any one propose to explore the ponds, they would do well to put themselves in communication with the Station Hotel, Castle Ashby, Northants. The best time for fishing the ponds is during August and September, and early morning or late evening is the most likely time to yield sport.

I have heard old anglers say that there is not a single pond, no matter how small it is, in the county of Herts but what contains carp and tench, principally the former; but they are for the most part the small or Prussian variety, that very seldom exceeds a pound, although odd ones of

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over two pounds have been taken occasionally from some of those ponds.

Float tackle and marsh worms seem to be more effective as a method of catching tench; while the leger and sweet paste is more likely to attract carp. These two fish are cunning and crafty beyond any others, the latter particularly so. Carp fishing generally is a display of patience; no elaborate instructions can with profit be laid down. If carp abound in a lake or mere, the only plan is to mix up a bit of sweet paste with honey, a drop or two of gin, a Town biscuit, and a penny packet of King's bait. Use a small lead or a bored bullet as a leger, a No. 6 sneck bend hook, and a bit of stiff ground-bait, nipped on a small shot fixed two inches from the hook; throw it in the clear runs, sit down quietly, and await developments. Sweet paste can be varied with such trifles as a small half-cooked potato, one about the size of a haricot bean, a green pea, a paste made from a rich pound cake, two or three wasp-grubs, or a nice brilliant marsh worm, according to the season of the year or the state of the water; but I must again point out that these fish, when denizens of mere and lake, are summer fish; we scarcely ever see them during the cold weather.

A friend of mine goes every year to a lake in France that has, so report says, carp up to thirty-four pounds in its waters; but he never succeeded in landing one that exceeded sixteen pounds, and only one of that weight. Once or twice he has hooked and lost fish that must have gone at least twenty pounds. They broke specially prepared gut lines, made from the very best Marana gut; every line had to stand a dead weight of twelve pounds before I passed them as fit for my friend's tackle case; and he has assured me more than once that certain carp he hooked in that lake could not be stopped: he never had fish that pulled half so hard. He has worried me more than a little about those French carp, and never was satisfied with his sport; he did not think his efforts were crowned with the success they deserved. Many a consultation and many a scheme have

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we laid together for the circumvention of those giant carp; but season after season comes and goes, and still the captures are few and far between. Last season, on arriving home from his month's holiday, he was in a state of suppressed excitement, and told me that a Frenchman had solved the problem. He mixed up some paste, and threw in a dozen or two pellets about the size of haricot beans on the previous evening, and fished with a similar pellet on his hook; and what was more, he caught many more fish than did my friend. The question now was, what was in that paste? I know several anglers who have a pet paste of their own, and keep the secret most carefully. They experimented with all sorts of things—aniseed, asafetida even, mixed with biscuit, King's bait, honey and gin; and the biscuit itself damped in the drop of water that a couple of lumps of sugar were dissolved in. One man used to get a dozen large and coarse lobworms, and cork them down in a wide-necked glass bottle until the worms went to a liquid. The more readily to accomplish this he put the jar full in the rays of a summer sun. This foul-smelling juice was added to his paste. Now and again some one hits upon something that proves fatal to one of these huge carp. I know of no fish that has had more experiments tried on him than carp; and the various pastes have been fearful and wonderful in their make up. This is a thing that a hard and fast line cannot be laid down on. If the angler fancies a certain bait, or a smelling unguent, he can only try; but it is very uncertain. My friend said he should have liked to have stolen a bit of that man's paste who got the fish in France, or else wormed the secret out of him; but his mouth and his bag were tightly closed, and that twenty-pounder came not my friend's way during his last holiday, at any rate.

I have heard of English carp weighing twenty-four pounds, but I never saw one that exceeded seventeen. We had one of that weight at the club to which I belong about three years ago.

Tench bite more freely than carp; sometimes in a good

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lake or mere they will come as quickly as roach, undeterred by the splashings of the hooked fish, or even fish escaping with hooks and tackle hanging from their jaws. More than once I have seen a hamper full of tench as the result of an evening's fishing; but it is only once or twice during the season that this can be relied on. The angler may go every evening for a month, and except on one occasion never get more than two or three fish at a sitting. There is one peculiarity about the mating of these lake fish that must be noted. Take bream and tench. In these fish the males outnumber the females by four or five to one. Tench are easy to distinguish between the sexes; bream and perch are not so easy to tell by just a passing glance; but tench cannot very well be mistaken. The male tench, unlike most fish, are very much the larger of the two, and can be picked out by their much coarser look and the huge size of their powerful fins. The female tench are more delicate looking, with much smaller fins. During spawning time I have seen a shoal of tench go stark staring mad, up to all sorts of capers; now and again a huge male clasping a much smaller female with his long and powerful fins, and holding tight for several seconds. Bream generally average three or four males to one female; with perch it is the other way about, females are more numerous. Pike appear to go by weight; supposing a big female of twenty pounds cannot find a mate that anywhere approaches her size, she generally has three, four, or five, the united weights of which about equal her own.

Another very handsome fish that inhabits lake and mere is the perch, and a good lake perch is a thing of beauty, running very much larger, on the whole, than in rivers. A brace of the finest perch I ever saw in my life was taken by a friend of mine from a private lake in the Midlands. He went down to clean some old paintings in the hall, and on the completion of his work asked permission to try the lake for a brace of trout to take home with him. He caught a couple of bleak in a small stream that ran out of the lake, and worked a paternoster under the overfall of a stream

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that fed the lake. No trout rewarded his efforts, but he got a brace of perch weighing four pounds five ounces and four pounds nine ounces respectively. They are both in one case to-day, and the very pride and joy of his collection.

When perch fishing a mere or lake, any small fish, such as a minnow or a bleak, or better still a gudgeon about two inches long, worked on a paternoster as described in Chapter III, will be much more effective than worms. Lake perch now and again have taken strange baits; they have been had on spoons, Wagtails, and once in particular I remember a pounder being caught fair and square when the bait was a six-ounce dace. They are not frightened at the size of the bait, but are like the boy in the nursery rhyme, "whose eye was bigger than his belly." Perch are very accommodating, and will at odd times take paste, gentles, wasp-grubs, cadbaits, and even a kernel or two of boiled wheat. But small fish on a paternoster, in my opinion, is the more certain method.

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CHAPTER XVI

CONCERNING ROACH

Roach and roach fishing—Autumn roach on many rivers—Good fish and good bags—Baits for roach—Different methods of fishing for roach—Good waters for roach—The methods of the experts—Fishing in a heavy flood—A Bank Holiday bag.

"*CYPRINUS RUTILUS*" is the most popular and the most sought after fish in the whole range of the bottom fisher's quarries. Thousands of men never go for anything else, and if they happen to hook a specimen of another species they are woefully disappointed. Some of these roach men put me in mind of my old friend Nottingham Bailey, who once got an invitation for a day on a first-class grayling stream, in which were also a few fine trout. It was September, a lovely stream with a tinge of colour was running, and the proprietor of the water went with him to see the sport. The two first fish that Bailey hooked were trout, which he carefully returned to the stream. The owner of the water protested, telling the angler that he could have a brace or two of those fish if he liked, and that they were worth more than any grayling he was likely to catch that day. "Sir," said that noted fisherman, "I have come here to-day after asking permission for grayling fishing, and I don't thank anything else to get on my hook." There are many roach fishermen who also don't thank anything else to get on their hooks, looking on a stray chub, or a bream, or a perch as an intruder, if they happen to get hold of one.

Roach are plentiful and widely distributed, waters containing them being found everywhere: pond or lake, river, stream, or canal, all contain roach in more or less abun-

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dance, and they range in size from the three-ounce fish of a wayside pond or a sluggish canal, to the three and the three and a quarter pounders of the Hampshire Avon and the Tring lakes.

Roach fishing itself is divided and subdivided into a good many different styles and methods, each one being adapted specially for its own district or river. The style that would be a huge success on one stream would be useless on another, and these styles vary so much that a stranger would have a difficulty in understanding it. On one water the float is three inches of a crow quill, carrying one shot only; on another it is a huge pelican quill or a Nottingham cork, carrying ten or a dozen big shots and a length of spiral wire; and they range between those sizes, to carry every grade of weight between the two. Roach are fish that adapt themselves to all seasons, biting during the sultry days of summer or the gales and floods of winter, during the golden autumn, or the budding spring; sudden and sharp frosts, following a bright, clear water, being an exception.

One of the very keenest and best roach fishermen I ever had as a mate has told me more than once that those fish were not worth catching until the fogs of November got within measurable distance. I hardly go so far as that: a September roach is all right; an October one is better; but I must admit that a November roach is a thing of beauty, bright as a bar of silver, clean as a new pin, and for his size a fighter of the first water; and, above all, the nasty weed that a few weeks earlier was so much in evidence in his stomach is then nearly absent.

Autumn roach appear to me to be pretty much alike in their nature and habits in most of the varied and widely stretching waters I have fished in. But the varied plans that must be adopted in the different waters is well-nigh bewildering; it is in this particular that the expert shines. The man who can see at a glance what to do, and then knows how to do it, is the one who has a show; when the other man, who thinks because he once got a bag of roach

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in a certain river he ought to get them in another, fails utterly as the natural consequences of his pigheadedness.

Roach vary in size to a very great extent, the average in some waters being three times as great as it is in others; and we look round and note the nature of the stream, the surroundings, and the habitat of the fish to find a reason for this. In some waters the average is as much as a pound per fish. I have seen bags from the Avon, the Kennet, the Dorsetshire Stour, the lakes at Tring in Hertfordshire, and even the Lea at Ware, where the average has exceeded the pound. Even in the Great Ouse, where during the early summer and autumn the average is not more than four or five ounces, taking them all round, as soon as November arrives the average goes up to six and eight ounces, and more than once I have had them as much as twelve ounces. My friend Mr. S. Hayward, of Trowbridge, tells me that his average from the Avon and Frome rivers has very often exceeded the pound during the month of October. That well-known angler has a case of four Frome roach that I should say is without a superior as a case of river roach, the weights being as follows: 2 lb. 11 oz.; 2 lb. 9 oz.; 2 lb. 4 oz.; and 2 lb. 2 oz. Nearly thirty years ago, when I fished the river Witham, in Lincolnshire, between Carlton-le-Moorland and Bassingham, a November bag of roach I got had an average of quite twelve ounces per fish; while a bag from the same swims on August Bank Holiday in the same year only averaged eight ounces. A friend of mine, fishing the Hampshire Avon last November, got twenty roach in three hours that weighed twenty-five pounds, the largest being only 1 lb. 7 oz., the average accordingly being very high.

The Trent itself in some parts of its course produces roach of a fine average size. Mr. Wallis, of Long Eaton, from his fishery near Cavendish Bridge, during the open autumn weather, gets fish that would run the Avon average very close. There was a six-feet-deep swim on the Trent at Staythorpe, some little distance above Averham Weir, a swim sheltered by a bank and a reedy promontory, where

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the late Tom Bentley and I got from fifteen to thirty pounds several times between us, that would average quite fourteen ounces each; once we got twenty-three roach that weighed twenty-two pounds. Another swim, not far from Dunham Bridge, right under the shadow of a mighty bush, that Charlie Hudson, the old Trent professional, and myself fished during the open winter a good many times, yielded roach of a splendid average. Scarcely one fish in every half-dozen would be less than half a pound, and most likely six or eight during the day would exceed the pound.

It appears to me, from a careful study of rivers far and wide, that roach run in schools; certain clearly defined swims seldom having any small fish in them, while others again rarely have anything in them but small fish. I noted a curious instance of this one day in the Great Ouse. A friend and I had our punt tied up to some flags, and another punt with two anglers was fixed not more than twenty-five yards away, and directly in the same track of the stream. Our fish went from six to fourteen ounces; while the others had scarcely half a dozen fish that exceeded our smallest. On comparing notes and baskets at night we were surprised at the difference in size in so short a distance.

Years ago, when the water under the railway bridge just below Newark-on-Trent was at least a yard higher at low water than it is at its lowest to-day, we used to get some splendid roach from the frothing eddy during October, fishing with two or three corns of stewed malt on the hook. A half-pounder was considered a small fish, three-quarters being the usual thing, varied with an occasional pounder. This habit of roach packing themselves in certain places and under certain conditions in uniform sizes, or nearly so, seems to be confined to late autumn and winter. During the summer it is usual to meet with them of nearly every size in one swim, more or less, as the nature of the swim suits the fish, very heavy waters being too strong for the smaller ones to surmount. I remember once, late in October, getting a very heavy bag of roach from the Great Ouse during a strong push of water, and it was the most curious

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and unequal bag of mixed roach I ever had. From the same swim I got one that went within an ounce of two pounds, followed by a scriper of only two ounces, and so on —a most uncommon bag for late October.

But one thing is certain, and that is, the heaviest roach are caught in the short winter days, when the weather is open, the water cloudy, and no sharp frosts about; a sudden and sharp frost during the early morning, particularly if the water is bright, is fatal to your chance of taking roach in very many rivers. I have got them in the melting snow broth; but a bright water and a keen frost puts them off the feed in the Kennet, the Thames, the Trent, the Great Ouse, the Ivel, and the Lea, only to mention a few.

'I remember once fishing the shallow water of the Ouse, between the Anchor Inn and Hartford Church, at the close of a long and severe frost. Snow had lain on the ground for a few weeks, and the river had been ice-bound. A rapid thaw early in February melted the snow, and the fresh water made a clear channel down the centre of the river; it was heavily charged with snow broth. I stood on the sound ice near the side, and fished within a foot of the edge of the ice that stretched at least twelve feet from the bank. Red worms and gentles were the hook-baits, and I gave them a small baiting of the usual bread-and-bran ground-bait. I used a rather heavy quill float, and ran it down just over the edge of the ice, the bait within an inch of the bottom. Those roach bit at every swim, and before I left off I had a basket completely full. There were no small fish whatever, the bulk going no less than ten to twelve ounces apiece. Once or twice on the Trent I have had roach from a melting snow water; and my friend Mr. S. Hayward assures me that several times he has had similar experiences in the Wiltshire Avon, getting on more than one occasion from twenty to thirty pounds of good-class roach when a thick and heavy snow water was running.

The back end of the year is always the best for roach, because, speaking generally, the rains of the late autumn, when we do get any, have flushed the rivers, sweeping away

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the accumulation of the previous months, and also taking with it a goodly proportion of the natural food of the roach. The heavy water also causes the fish to seek the shelter of overhanging banks, where there are deep holes and eddies; also behind bushes and flags, or where projecting corners of the bank stick out and form a quiet lay-by or eddy. I have had some of my very best roach from a heavy water when the float has been within two feet of the bank. But one thing must be noted, the tackle must be weighted more, and the float must be larger, than is required for the low, bright summer water.

As good a winter bait as can be used for roach during a heavy push of water is about an inch from the tail end of a lobworm, threaded on a No. 8 Crystal hook; a small red worm wriggling crossways on the point is an extra attraction when added to the tail end. When the water clears down a little more, then a bunch of gentles can be tried, and do not be afraid at the back end of the year to put plenty on, five or six being none too many if the fish run large. A good nubble of paste, made from a Town biscuit and a packet of King's natural bait, is also good when the water has cleared down a bit; while breadcrust cut into small cubes can be tried if the water is slightly coloured and running fairly strong.

When ground-baiting a roach swim during the winter months, and you have a difficulty in getting a supply of lobworms to mince up, a few balls of bread and bran, kneaded up very stiff, can be used with great advantage; and this ground-bait will do for any winter bait you can use—worms, gentles, breadcrust, and paste; but use it very sparingly at that season, a dozen balls the size of moderate oranges being ample for nearly any swim. During the winter, more particularly if there is a slightly coloured water, running pretty fair, it is best to ground-bait by nipping a bit about the size of a walnut on a tiny split shot fixed a couple of inches above the hook; this shales away in tiny fragments after reaching the bottom, and can be renewed from time to time as required. This is a far better

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plan to keep your swim in proper working order than throwing it in loose; a little on the shot every now and again goes a long way.

There are at least three different ways of fishing for roach, and one or two of these methods also can be subdivided into further sections. The eighteen-foot roach pole and the tight line have very many advocates on many waters. This plan is adopted generally on wide and sluggish rivers that run fairly deep, a medium porcupine float and the finest of tackle being necessary. Then there is a school of roach anglers who use a fifteen-foot rod, but also employ, in addition, a reel and running tackle, fishing in deep and wide rivers, and meres that have some pretence to a stream running down them. Then there is another school that must of necessity use a light and handy rod, not more than eleven feet in length at the outside, with one of the easiest-running centre-pin reels and the finest of undressed silk lines, who must also use a larger float and a much heavier weighted tackle than their brethren of the deeper, slower streams. The men of the fast waters are compelled in many cases to throw their float right out into mid-stream; while the fishermen of the deep and sluggish waters often find their quarry in close proximity to the bank.

I have fished in the company of the finest roach-pole men that London has in its ranks, and I never found much difficulty in holding my own; and I never yet used a long roach pole and a tight line. The nearest approach to it has been with a fifteen-foot white cane rod, a centre-pin reel, and the usual running line and tackle. I can look back over the last twenty years at any rate, and cannot find a single occasion when I could not comfortably fish the Thames, the Lea, the Great Ouse, the Colne, the Blackwater, the Medway, the Nene, the Wey, the Stour, and several others by that plan; all these rivers having more or less one great feature in common. The Trent and the Witham, together with various other rivers and streams—some narrow, some very much wider, but all of them pretty fast running and somewhat shallow and bright—must have

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the Trent man's motto of "fine and far off" carried out to the letter, if a catch of roach is to be made from those waters.

Roach fishing is the most cosmopolitan sport going; it lends itself to any and every class of fisherman as no other does or can. The country labourer, with his long willow rod, just as nature fashioned it, and his modest stock of hooks and lines, enjoys his sport, and probably gets more out of it than the merchant who gives ten pounds for his outfit and travels far and wide in his search for roach. The man with a wooden leg, or a hopeless cripple, can sit quietly on his basket, when he could not climb the crags and rocks and torrents of a mountain stream, or rove the streams and heavy currents for chub and barbel. In my wanderings I have seen the schoolboy of nine and the veteran of eighty, a most wonderful assortment of rods and tackle, that if collected together would make a marvellous exhibition; and all this assortment of men and material has been engaged in the capture of the widely distributed and accommodating roach.

For years I roamed the Great Ouse from St. Neots down to Denver Sluice, and had sport of the best. Very many times I have had little or nothing to show for a day's work; many other times the fish have been few but good; and every time there was much to see. Nature in all her changes was ever unfolding her beauties, and we could look from nature to nature's God, and feel glad we had lived our lives.

Roach and roach fishing open out such a vista of thought that I fail to do justice to it. Rivers far and wide—from the fens of Lincolnshire to the valley of the Trent, from the Trent to the Great Ouse, from the Great Ouse to the southern rivers, from the Nene to the Hampshire Avon, and the varied streams intersected between—have been visited; and I might add that the waters were very few and widely separated where the privilege of fishing had to be paid for.

Roach fishing in all these waters can be enjoyed easily. My two rods were ample—the fifteen-foot rod for the

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deeper, quieter rivers; the eleven-foot Nottingham for the smaller, faster streams. The three-and-a-half-inch centre-pin reel will do for both styles. Fifty yards of undressed silk line; a dozen assorted floats of all ordinary sizes; a few gut lines of one and two yards; and a few dozens of Crystal hooks; together with the net and the usual odd-ments, in a good roomy seat-basket, will complete an outfit that will enable you to roam far and wide wherever roach are to be found. You can take the word of one who has tried it, and not failed.

Hook-baits can be summed up in a few words. Cad-baits, gentles, wasp-grubs, worms, breadcrust, paste, and stewed grain have stood me in good stead; while the ordi-nary bread-and-bran ground-bait has been effective any where and at any time, summer and winter.

One September day up the Thames, when the water was clouded and a good stream running, over a hundred roach felt the steel, lured by the fatal crust. Another day down the Great Ouse, at Littleport, I got seventy roach weighing fifty pounds, using stewed red wheat on the hook, and two pailfuls of the bread-and-bran ground-bait. A catch of ninety roach, going sixty pounds, on paste stands out as a red-letter day for the Lincolnshire Witham; while a huge catch of one hundred and fifty roach, weighing one hundred and twenty-seven pounds, taken on gentles, is far and away my record for the Trent. I wonder how many blanks I have had on all rivers. I go through my notebook, and soon find them recorded even more numerous than the good days.

Curious things in plenty come in the way of all persistent roach men; but one of the most curious I ever saw was a catch of twelve roach made on the Great Ouse one late autumn by a great friend of mine. When the fish were put on the club scales to be weighed in, they went 11 lb. 15½ oz., and yet not one of the twelve would take down the pound weight. A most wonderful dozen; I shall never again see such a lot, even if I have a hundred fish to select from, and my friend had only sixteen in his bag that day.

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Come with me for a few minutes and see some of London's experts—Jimmy Moffatt, Johnny Osborn, Bill Osment, or a dozen others who have made roach fishing their special hobby for many years. See these men with their roach poles, plumbing the depth ever so carefully; making up their paste in a bit of white rag; nipping a nubble of stiff ground-bait on the tiny shot two inches from the hook; shotting their tackle so carefully that only the tip end of their float is visible, with the bottom edge of the bulky cap on the extreme top sitting exactly on the surface of the water; see them sit low down, every nerve strung to its utmost tension, following that slowly crawling float as it travels down stream. But what is that? The float-cap lifts itself above the water, just a fraction of an inch, that a novice would never notice, and "chung!" you stand amazed as a lusty pounder fights his last battle.

Or go with me up the Trent and see one of the Nottingham school of experts. You will notice a wide difference between these two. The Trent man has got his shorter rod, his easy centre-pin reel, his fine silk line, his one-yard tackle, and his red-tipped swan-quill float; his hook is garnished with a few gentles, a couple of cadbaits, the tail end of a lob, or two or three kernels of stewed wheat or malt. He throws his ground-bait far out in the stream; he casts his bait in his own inimitable style; the red tip of his quill sticks fair above the water, held slanting back by the finger and thumb that pays out the line. Away down stream goes the float ten, twenty, thirty yards, till the stranger is lost in astonishment; but this time in that current the float shoots down, and away, fighting for its very life, goes a lusty roach, the fine tackle and the strong stream getting every ounce of enjoyment out of the fighting fish.

What angler who has seen the sparkling streams of the Trent, the middle Witham, the Kennet, and the Hampshire Avon; the slower depths of the Bedfordshire Ouse, the Nene, and the Norfolk broads; the varied deeps,

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shallows, streams, and sluggish reaches of the Thames; and the rising and falling of the tidal waters of the south, did not wish he could always be there on one or other of the banks? This roach fishing is the very gem of a bottom fisherman's life, and once started on his career and deeply bitten, the craze is never cured; no, not even if iron bars surround him.

The great thing to be observed in roach fishing is to use rods and tackle exactly suited to the district. Floats should be no larger or smaller than the water requires, and always shot so that the smallest nibble can be detected. Use your ground-bait judiciously and well; and, above all, look out for a sandy or gravelly bottom, where the curling eddies and streams and the neighbouring weed beds bring the food down to the very haunts of those handsome sporting fish.

During a heavy flood sport can sometimes be obtained from strange places. I have caught roach fifty yards away from the main river. Once I got twenty good fish on a flooded roadway that led down to a ford; they get into all sorts of corners and eddies to escape the force of the big stream that generally runs at that time. Another day, during a summer flood, I got two dozen very heavy roach from the side of a fence that at ordinary times was at least twenty yards from the river. A friend of mine tied his punt to a lamp-post in a riverside village street when the floods were very high, and got a beautiful basket of roach. But one of the strangest places of all was the pathway by the side of a friend's cabbage plot. This path at the bottom end was flooded to the depth of at least two feet, and an old shed caused the water to form a beautiful eddy, which looked so tempting that my friend had a go, and in two hours landed fourteen pounds of fine roach; and all the bait he had was about a score of lobworms clipped up small for ground-bait, and a handful of cockspurs for the hook.

In this sort of fishing it is well if you know your ground. I used to make it my business to carefully take stock of all

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likely-looking places, that were free from bushes and dangerous obstructions, where an eddy would most likely be formed in the flood water, and where the bank came sloping up from the river. A handful or two of clipped-up worms and a small red on the hook, fished well on the bottom, like stret-pegging, has more than once succeeded in getting me a bag of roach when the sport during the low, bright water had been indifferent. A suitable place during a big flood is very often of the utmost value; and during the low water these swims and places can be selected, and carefully noted for use the next time they are deeply covered with a rising flood water.

Down the Lower Trent there was a country lane that led to a primitive landing-stage, some quarter of a mile away from the river. This lane went under a railway arch. Under this arch the roadway dipped considerably, and during a heavy flood this lane was a small river, with a steady stream flowing. Under that arch one summer's day, in a heavy flood water, I got a splendid bag of mixed fish—fourteen roach, four dace, two barbel, three bream, and a chub; and at night the late Frank Sims and myself put an eel net across the arch, and we got twenty pounds of the silver-bellied migratory Trent eels, that were travelling seawards and had missed their way.

I remember one August Bank Holiday, when I lived on the banks of the Great Ouse, fishing a lovely swim within ten feet of the bank. A row of flags nearly waist-high extended for at least twenty yards, and there were six feet of water and a sandy bottom close under the very shadow of those flags. On the Saturday previous we had a mighty thunderstorm, and one of the heaviest downpours I can remember; it came down without ceasing until very nearly midday on Sunday, and after that for the whole holiday the weather was of the most glorious description.

On the Monday I found the water slightly stained, and rising slowly and gradually; in fact, it came on six inches during the day. The swim in question was in the meadow not far from the old cottage between Offord and Paxton,

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close behind the railway. The swim and its surroundings, together with the wind and weather, and the condition of the water, were as nigh perfection as it was possible to have them. A fringe of thick flags, behind which to sit; a swim exactly at the point of the rod, with the same depth of water close under the flags; a slightly coloured and rising water, and a splendid level sandy bottom, is a combination of affairs that you cannot depend on many times during the season. We can find the swims in plenty all down the Great Ouse, the Nene, and the Norfolk rivers, reed fringed and deep close under our very feet, but a coloured rising water and a faster stream is not always our portion.

That August Bank Holiday is one of my cherished memories. For years I set apart that day for roach fishing, and right well have I succeeded, hardly ever getting a blank, two of those days in particular on the Witham yielding twenty-pound bags, but that holiday on the Ouse was a red-letter day. I used a pailful of bread-and-bran ground-bait, and one kernel of red wheat baited the No. 11 Mackenzie hook. Many times did my six-shot porcupine float travel down that swim, many times did it dip down when passing one particular place, and many times did my white cane rod make music as the lusty roach fought gamely for liberty. There were fifty in the bag at night, going thirty pounds, and the memory still lingers, though years have passed.

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CHAPTER XVII

A MIXED BASKET

Murkett and the model pike—How it was not landed—The Trent as a salmon river—The runaway salmon—Two good angling feats—Thames trout—How the big one got away—How the other was landed—Ishmaels of the stream—The flagstaff on the mountain top.

MURKETT'S BIG PIKE

WHEN I lived on the banks of the Great Ouse there was a tale told in the locality of how a celebrated fisherman was hoodwinked by a couple of practical jokers. The story is so good that it would be a pity to let it sink into oblivion.

Any one strolling along the highway from Godmanchester to Huntingdon must have noticed an old-fashioned but strongly built brick bridge that spans a rather wide stretch of the Great Ouse, just on the boundary line between those two old and ancient boroughs; and if he were an angler I warrant me he peeped over the wall and down into the depths of that glorious old river, and wondered what mighty denizens of the deep lurked in its silent shadows. A little distance away up stream was another bridge, built on stout wooden piles, that carried the Midland Railway from Kettering to Cambridge over the river. This small stretch of water, known locally as "Between the Bridges," was a famous spot for fish of various kinds, and many a grand bag of bream, roach, and pike has been had therefrom. At the foot of the bridge on the Godmanchester side stood an old-fashioned public-house with a curious semicircular front, which rejoiced in the name of the "Woolpack," but owing to its shape was known among its frequenters as the "Round House."

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This house was, I fancy, kept for some years by an old fisherman named Murkett, who eked out a comfortable livelihood by piloting angling visitors to the various well-known swims in the vicinity; and a rare good and successful fisherman he was too, as rough and rugged as the native pollards that reared their gaunt forms from among the flags and morass on the river's edge. Book-learning he had none: the schoolmaster in his case was very much abroad; but the wide-stretching meadows, and the winding sluggish river, in their varying garbs and changes, was an open book to him, that in all probability yielded up secrets which the best book-learned man would never discover. I heard that at last he died on the river itself that he had well-nigh lived upon. He took his boat out and fastened it up alongside some flags that fringed a well-known spot, and with rod in hand had plumbed his last swim, and then gone on that journey from which no traveller ever returns; at least, this is what I was told by one who was intimately acquainted with him.

While he lived at the "Round House" there was a tradition that a huge pike had taken possession of the very deep pool between the bridges; and this pike and the capture of it became a mania with poor old Murkett. During the season his patrons and himself were constantly on the war-path, for so settled were his convictions on the existence of this giant pike that it was the sole subject of his talk and the sole aim of his efforts. A jack of twelve pounds, and another one of fourteen, taken from the pool only served to whet his appetite still further. And so things went on until one day, in late autumn, a couple of strangers, young men, came down for a quiet holiday. One of them was a wood-carver and the other a painter and fine art restorer. It was not long before they had more than a nodding acquaintance with Murkett and the object of his great ambition. They speedily hatched a scheme between themselves that for originality of thought, ingenuity of detail and construction, and daring in carrying it out to a successful issue has hardly been equalled; and

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the very surroundings of the place lent themselves to the plan.

They made and painted to life a wooden model of a huge pike, with open jaws and red gleaming gills. In place of a tail they fixed a pair of curious curved blades, a good deal like the fans on a spinning tackle, only very much larger. These blades caused the fish to swirl in the water when suddenly drawn under, startlingly like a thing of life. A huge iron weight with a big ring in it was next procured, in addition to a long length of very strong cord that was at least five or six times as strong as Murkett's tackle.

Seizing a favourable opportunity, this weight was quietly dropped from a boat, with the cord threaded through the ring so that it would run freely. The two ends of the cord were then fastened under water within the shelter of a friendly boat-house that overlooked the scene of operations, and in which the two friends could hide. All was now ready. Murkett's big punt had been fastened to its usual stakes for several weeks, just outside the run of the river traffic; the heavy weight was sunk half-way between the punt and the boat-house, and it was not many days before a favourable opportunity presented itself. The old man and a patron had been pike fishing from this fixed punt all the morning; our artist friends had seen the chance, and promptly availed themselves of it. It was the usual practice of the fishermen to leave the bait and float in the river while they went ashore in a smaller punt to have their midday meal. It was only the work of a very few moments to fix the hooks of the snap tackle firmly into the jaws of that model pike, while his companion drew the float under water by the cord threaded through the ring on the sunken weight.

The two friends, from their coign of vantage in the shelter of the boat-house, unseen themselves, but seeing everything, awaited developments. Presently our two anglers came round the corner of the house, got into their punt, and slowly paddled across, and as Murkett climbed over the

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side and saw his float had disappeared, he yelled out: "Quick! we've got a run!" His companion picked up the rod, and tightening the line, there ensued such a battle royal that it beggars description. Aided by the invisible cord in the hands of the artist, that fish pulled and plunged like a thing of life, ever and anon just showing his red gills above the water, only to be drawn under again with a swirling splash as the strong cord and the curved blades did their work. The excitement was intense; the audience on the bridge grew larger; the words of advice shouted down were contradictory in a marked degree; and above it all was heard the voice of Murkett: "We've hooked the big un!"

Time after time that fish was drawn to the surface, only to disappear again on the instant in the midst of a boiling splash. So marvellously life-like was it, and so true to nature were its plunges, that it was no wonder old and experienced anglers were deceived. Again and again that fish plunged down to the weight thirty yards or more away, only to be carefully drawn back again inch by inch, apparently fighting for dear life every foot of the way. At length, after nearly an hour of this tussle, the fish was dragged down and the cord made fast; and as ordinary tackle was not strong enough to lift that weight when firmly embedded in the mud and sand on the bottom, the line was broken, and the anglers went home with the look of disappointed men, and without the least suspicion that an ingenious trick had been played upon them; although, if they had heard the smothered yells of laughter from that old boat-house they might have had suspicions.

Poor old Murkett to the day of his death never would believe that it was a trick that had been played, even when a short account of the affair was read to him from the columns of a local newspaper. He knew better than that; he had handled too many jack in his lifetime, and knew a pike when he saw one, was all the comment he made about it.

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WHEN THE TRENT WAS A SALMON RIVER

The Trent was once a salmon river, and fish were got on both the upper and the lower waters by both nets and rods; but of late years I have not heard of any being taken. The salmon appear to have forsaken it altogether, or very nearly so. Sometimes a stray one rolls up to the surface, but they are very odd and far between, and the good old days at Shardlow, when a dozen fish fell to one rod during a single season, I am afraid is past and gone. Trent salmon used to run a tidy size; the average would be at least eighteen pounds, and they were generally caught on a spinning bait, or else fell victims to a bunch of lobworms. I never heard all the time I lived on the banks of that river of one being taken on the fly. I have seen them in dozens at the top weirs, Newark, leaping at the formidable jump, that would land them fair and square in the upper waters for their journey up stream; while all under the crow trees and up that stretch to the plaster wharf were kelts by the score, waiting for a friendly freshet to send them rejoicing on their way seawards.

I have heard many anglers say that salmon don't feed when they are in fresh water, but I have known them to take a bunch of lobworms and also the spinning bait, and been hooked fair and square in the mouth; so they must have some sort of a notion about it. But still, there is a wide difference in the condition of the fish when they jump up the stream at the back end of the year and when some months later they drop down again to the sea, after completing their domestic affairs.

I can remember the time when salmon fishing in the Trent used to be considerably indulged in, and a good many rod licences were issued by the Fishery Board; and pretty stiff rents were paid for certain well-known river haunts of those fish. The majority of the anglers used a metal bait, a Derby Killer or a Blue Phantom being the patterns most in vogue; while now and again a huge bunch of lob-

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worms—sometimes as many as five or six, threaded on a big Carlisle hook so that the ends hung about in a huge bunch, with another smaller hook about three inches higher up—would sometimes entice a well-mended kelt, and at odd times a good fresh-run one.

There used to be three or four good salmon nets down the Lower Trent. I have seen as many as half a dozen good fish taken in a single haul. Once I saw a very curious thing, that illustrated the great strength of salmon in a remarkable way. The netsmen had just drawn their net on to a very big sand bed, that stretched for a considerable distance round the abrupt corner nearly opposite Muskham Church. They dragged the net at least twenty yards from the water's edge. There were three salmon in it: two of them were killed by blows on the head with a mallet, but the third, a splendid little fish of about fifteen pounds, slipped from under the man's grasp and made for the river, the whole party in hot pursuit. That fish covered the twenty-five yards in record time, and vanished in the river. The muscular strength of that salmon must have been very great, as it forced itself over the loose sand quicker than those men could run; we all failed to intercept it.

I consider that one of the finest bits of sport I ever had, and I may say without boasting one that taxed my skill to the utmost, was an hour and twenty minutes I spent in fighting it out with a fresh-run nineteen-pound Trent salmon. I was dace fishing down a stream that ran from a weir, using a light chub rod, a fine silk line, and the ordinary fine undrawn gut I usually employed for that purpose; the hook was a No. 8, and the bait a couple of small cockspur worms. He took it when the float was at least twenty yards down stream, and on my striking sharply on seeing the float dip he gave a magnificent challenge by leaping at least a yard in the air, and then falling on the stream with a splash that sent the spray far and wide. That fish was a flier, no sooner in than he was out again; he leaped at least a score of times, but the hook held firm through it all. Not once did he sulk on the bottom, so I

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kept him on the go all the time, finally landing him on the shallows nearly half a mile lower down the stream, the hook coming away as soon as his head got on the sands, and I had to hastily hook my fingers under his gills and draw him into safety. I was rather proud of that feat, as the tackle was refina gut, and only up to killing a three-pound barbel, which was the outside of anything I expected on those shallows.

Once in the Winthorp Corporation barbel swim I saw Old Kitty, one of the very best Trent men who ever handled a rod, hook a salmon on his barbel tackle, about a twenty-pounder. He played that fish, like the master he was, under the eyes of an admiring audience, including a gentleman who afterwards was a member of the Trent Fishery Board. The fish was finally landed in the same workmanlike manner that it had been played; it was tipped into the landing-net as though it had been poked in with a stick; and as the small but admiring group were gathered round, and congratulations poured out, the voice of the gentleman broke in with: "I suppose you know that if you have no licence to catch salmon that fish must be returned to the river?" Fortunately for our friends their names and addresses were unknown to the speaker; so Old Kitty turned quietly to his mate and said, "Tom, I think we had better go and see after our tea." The fish went with them.

The largest salmon I ever saw taken from the Trent with rod and line weighed thirty-two pounds nine ounces, a splendid fresh-run fish, hooked at twenty minutes past twelve one midday by the late Tom Bentley, and played alternately by three or four of us. It did not finally succumb until twenty minutes past four in the afternoon, a prolonged fight lasting four hours; but it was taken on chub tackle. My old friend Tom had to interview the local magistrates with regard to that fish, and the upshot of the conversation was he had to pay cash down at the rate of one shilling a pound for the privilege of handling that thirty-two-pounder. But he was nothing out of pocket, having sold it for exactly the amount of the fine. Tom's

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fatal error in not providing himself with a salmon licence was the cause of all the trouble.

THAMES TROUT

At the foot of a well-known weir on the Upper Thames there lived and flourished one of the largest Thames trout that even that noted river could boast of; it was quite fifteen pounds in weight, and might have been seen at certain clearly specified times giving the bleak an anxious time as he surged among them, scattering them right and left, some of them leaping above the surface in their haste to escape. There he was, feeding every day as regular as the clock; and a pair of anxious eyes would note this feeding time, the very course he took when on the prowl, and every little item in connection therewith was carefully put down in a notebook by the owner of the eyes in question. That man had a patron who had set his heart on the capture of that fish, and spent many days at it; but time went on, and the whole season passed by, and all the efforts he put forth were unavailing. His spinning tackle was made from the best salmon gut; his live-bait snaps made from the same material, with a fixed lip-hook, and nearly four inches from it a No. 8 treble hook, so arranged that this treble was close to the tail of the bait; his trace was a couple of yards of good salmon gut; no lead at all; the float was a flat bit of cork cut from a small bung, about an inch and a quarter long and three-quarters of an inch wide, with a point at one end and a hole through the centre lengthways, the float being about three-eighths of an inch thick. This float served the purpose of keeping the bleak within reasonable bounds. A fine undressed silk line well greased, a centre-pin reel, and a stout barbel rod about completed all required.

I was wondering one day how many hours my friend had put in after that trout. A Thames trout fisherman confessed one day that he had been fairly successful with those fish, as far as success could be gauged by anybody not in

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the know, although his fish had cost him at the very least a sovereign a pound; and yet they are not a fish that require a very elaborate outfit, both spinning tackles and live-bait snaps being simple in the extreme, but it must be extra good. One day, about two seasons ago, my friend saw that fish feeding, and his live bleak was worked down to him, and he had it like a flash, and was securely hooked. The fight was long and stubborn, but gradually the fish was worked to the foot of the weir, on the top of which the angler stood. It was a difficult place to land him; unfortunately he could not get on the shore on either side while he had the hooked fish. Shouts failed to bring his man to his assistance, and so he determined to fight it out where he stood. His man now brought a boat, or at least attempted to do so; but the woodwork at the foot of the weir proved his undoing. This woodwork was like a platform, and about six inches under the water. The fish flopped on the top of it, one hook of his treble stuck firmly in the edge, the great trout rolled over and was gone, leaving the tackle firmly fixed in that villainous timber. My friend packed up, and has never since wetted a line. That was the chance of a lifetime, that most assuredly comes to no man twice in his fishing career, even if that career reaches as mine has reached, across the vista of a half-century.

Thames trout fishing is decidedly the sport for the man with money and plenty of time on his hands; he never knows when he will get hold. He may live-bait and spin for a week at a stretch, and never get one; his heart may jump into his mouth a few times when a lanky barbel, a logger-headed chub, or a foul jack goes off with a strong fighting drag, that makes him think the very king of the Thames fish has got it. He may spin and live-bait for hours at a stretch, and not touch a single fish; or he might, as has happened more than once, put up his spinning tackle in a very leisurely manner, cast it right out into mid-stream, and the very instant it touches the water away it goes in one wild rush for forty or fifty yards; and a bar of glittering

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gold and silver flings itself out of the water far down that weir pool, and our angler is trying to recover the balance he so nearly lost in that desperate race, and bracing himself for the struggle that he knows a ten-pounder is so capable of giving.

Or what do you think of this picture? A good Thames trout has been feeding at intervals in one spot for many months. Experts have tried high and low, have exhausted almost all their tricks and wiles, but on one particular afternoon that I shall ever remember two of them were still engaged in the task, when a boy came down with the strongest and plainest of a rig-out, fixed a small roach on a huge treble, that was mounted on brass gimp as thick as stout string, threw it in with a wallop about four yards from the bank, and the next instant was hanging on like grim death. A few seconds later boy and trout were rolling on the grass, and that nine-pounder, over which so much skill and time had been expended, fell a victim to the rudest tackle and the very smallest display of skill. Ah well! I expect it ever will be so. We shall have to put up with this sort of thing, even if our feelings are outraged and many more prizes snatched from under our very noses. But it is all in the game when fishing for Thames trout.

ISHMAELS OF THE STREAMS

If there is one fish more than another that can be classed as an outlaw, "whose hand is against every man's hand, and every man's hand against him," that one is the ruffe or pope. This small member of the perch tribe is a terror to many of the very best anglers I know. They would sooner not have a bite at all than pull up one of his fraternity. There is such a melancholy look in his eye, not to say pathetic, as though he was sorry to have given you all that trouble, and if you would let him go again he would never do it again. Scores of anglers are under the impression that when one or two of these fish are biting they will get nothing else; it would be no good trying any further. My

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old friend the late Tom Sunman, one of the finest Trent anglers who ever handled a rod, was decidedly of this way of thinking. I have known him more than once to bait up a Trent swim, and on trying it, after an infinite amount of trouble and expense, to hook up a ruffe; the second and the third fish were also ruffe. This was quite enough: the flow of language was more forcible than polite; then he would pack up his tackle, put away his boat, and go home for the rest of that day, and nothing would entice him out again.

Yes, pope belong to the Ishmaels of the stream; they generally add insult to injury. Not content with spoiling a carefully arranged and threaded bait, they swallow it right down to the bottom button of their waistcoats; and if they go from four to five and a half inches long, and weigh less than two ounces, it is the outside you can expect. And then if you cut off his head there is very little left.

It is not very often we hear of a ruffe being honoured with a glass case; but my friend Mr. W. L. Sanderson, of London, caught such an extraordinary one at Lechlade, on the Thames, this year that it was promptly sent to Cooper's to be made beautiful for ever. I never heard of such a pope; it was no less than seven and a half inches in length and five and a half in girth. Mr. Sanderson said when he caught it it weighed a long way on for half a pound; Mr. Cooper, on being appealed to, said it went over a quarter of a pound, at any rate.

This must be the record English ruffe; I have never seen or heard of one anything like it. One or two authorities that I have looked up say it is very seldom they exceed five inches in length; so Mr. Sanderson can be congratulated on getting this record Ishmael of the Thames.

THE FLAGSTAFF ON THE MOUNTAIN TOP

Late one autumn I had a little holiday in Wales where a river ran along a most glorious valley, and a mountain range stretched away on either hand nearly as far as the eye could

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see. That valley of the Vyrnwy was a lovely spot, shut in by those mighty hills that hushed the sound of the busy world, a solitude and quietness that was only broken at long intervals by the sharp detonations of the blasting operations at some neighbouring slate quarries. I had never been there before, and had not the slightest idea as to what the country was like, arriving overnight, the last stage of the journey being done in the darkness. The second stage of that journey, from Shrewsbury to Buttington, however, had excited my admiration, and made me long for the morrow.

Next morning I rose before the servants were about, and wandered out in search of adventure. After a quarter of an hour's ramble I got into what afterwards turned out to be a deep gorge or valley. The mists were so thick and heavy that it was impossible to see very far. I could just make out the line of the river below my feet, but above and around it was nothing but one vast cloud of the whitest mist. Looking from river to sky, my eye was suddenly arrested by a strange sight. High up in the air a thin shaft of golden light pointed straight upwards, a marvellous contrast to the gloom, mist, and semi-darkness all below it. I wondered whatever it could be so many hundreds of feet up above me, with apparently no foundation for it to rest upon except the heavy mists of the morning. I looked in amazement; poised high up, that golden shaft of light reared its long length from the very topmost billows of those huge banks of mist. But presently, as I gazed, the shaft of light gradually spread further downwards, and then the mystery stood revealed.

It was only the flagstaff on the highest point of the mountain, that the rising sun behind and below threw out in bold relief. Those mighty hills were between me and the rising sun, hence the deception. It looked beautiful—just the tip of the mountain flooded in one glorious halo of light, and the valley where I stood all darkness and gloom.

I have never forgotten it; when I retraced my steps and sat down to that morning meal the ham and eggs and

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the cups of tea were all the sweeter. The holiday was all the brighter; the grayling fought ever so much better; the chub of those "Celtic fringes," as a great statesman once called that country, seemed to have redder fins, and leaped with more freedom than did their brothers of the Trent. It was that flagstaff that caused the difference. I have made it my motto ever since. If all seems dark and gloomy round my feet I look up, and still can see that shaft of light, pointing upwards from the gloom, and read in it a bright message of hope, and joy, and peace.

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